THE Hudson REVIEW

WENDELL BERRY:
Standing by Words

JULIA O'FAOLAIN:
Daughters of Passion—a story

WILLIAM H. PRITCHARD:
Blackmur's Last Song

CLARA CLAIBORNE PARK:
Ghosts on a Gold Mountain

MARVIN MUDRICK:
The Publicity Hound

ns by DAVID ROSENBERG,
ER DAVISON, CELIA GILBERT, RUTH FAINLIGHT.

Reviews by JAMES FINN COTTER, DANA GIOIA,
GILBERTO PEREZ, VERNON YOUNG, EMILY GROSHOLZ.

Bennett Award Acceptance Speech by V. S. NAIPAUL.

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V. S. NAIPAUL

Bennett Award Acceptance Speech, 1980

This award has given me much pleasure. In the first place it was unexpected. And then I liked the terms of the award. It was for one's work as a whole. So it didn't just acknowledge one book, one piece of luck; it acknowledged the vocation. And by acknowledging the vocation it did away with the idea of a competition. There is no competition among writers, because every writer is different. Every writer has his own voice, his own view, his own interests.

In the definition of himself, though, the definition of the kind of person he is, a writer is assisted by the response to his work—but here I begin to speak personally. I was reading the other day about Pushkin. He said of a certain woman that she was the best kind of critic: after she had heard a poem she simply said that that line was bad and she didn't like it. A writer needs that kind of criticism. But equally necessary, and perhaps better for the writer who is full of self-distrust (and self-distrust comes with every new piece of work), is the critic who says: "That line is good; that observation is more valuable than you think; don't throw it away." I have been lucky. I have always had people like that around me from the very start: people who, by telling me what to keep, enabled me, as a writer, to be myself.

Writing is not an eternal in human society. There are societies and cultures where writers do not exist or are not thought necessary. Recently I was in Java. The Javanese are among the world's most civilized people. But their civilization is complete, and the young man I met couldn't tell his mother that he was writing poetry. It would have been too absurd; for her, poetry was something that had already been written, all of it. To have a son saying he was a poet was like having a son saying he was being Homer.

And the book is a physical object. It needs to be printed, reviewed, sold, read, stored. I stress what is obvious because I was born in a small island where the book—as the new, created thing—didn't exist. I have never been able to take the book for granted. I have always been aware that the book and the writing vocation are possible only in certain societies. We might feel that the vocation will win through. But the vocation needs help. It needs the living, receptive society where many voices are heard.

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THE Hudson Review

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Notes on Contributors

A Part, WENDELL BERRY's latest book of poems, was published this past fall by North Point Press.

Doubleday has recently published DAVID ROSENBERG's* newest book of Biblical translations, entitled *Chosen Days.* Mr. Rosenberg is now at work on a complete version of the Book of Lamentations.

No Country for Young Men is JULIA O'FAOLAIN's* most recent novel, published in England by Allen Lane.

The selection of poems in this issue will be included in PETER DAVISON's *Barn Fever and Other Poems,* to be published in the spring by Atheneum.

CELIA GILBERT's* first collection of poetry, *Queen of Darkness,* was published by Viking in 1977. She lives in Cambridge, Massachusetts.

RUTH FAINLIGHT's most recent book of poems is *Sibyls and Others.*

GILBERTO PEREZ teaches film at Cornell University. He is now at work on a book of film theory and criticism.

CLARA CLAIBORNE PARK teaches English at Williams College. She is the author of *The Siege: The First Eight Years of an Autistic Child.*

EMILY GROSHOLZ is currently editing a book of essays on Leibniz' philosophical and scientific work for Harvester Press in England.

DANA GIOIA* is a businessman in New York. He is presently editing *The Selected Short Stories of Weldon Kees* for Abattoir Editions. A group of his poems will appear in a future issue of *The Hudson Review.*

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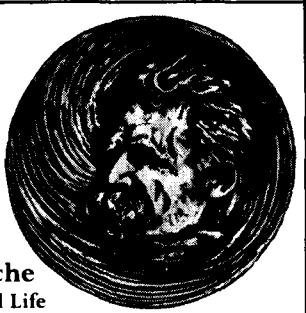

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Among the foreign contributions to this new issue of the New Directions anthology are a set of sonnets composed via airmail between Charles Tomlinson (England) and Octavio Paz (Mexico City). There is a variety of prose and poetry from both established and unknown American writers as well as work from France, New Zealand, Japan, Canada, Hungary, and India. Also included is a selection of drawings by writers—Proust, Shaw, Twain among others—from the Norman Holmes Pearson Collection at the Beinecke Library. *Cloth*, $15.95; *ND Paperbook* 510, $5.95

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WENDELL BERRY

Standing by Words

"He said, and stood . . ."
Paradise Regained, IV, 561.

TWO EPIDEMIC ILLNESSES OF OUR TIME—upon both of which virtual industries of cures have been founded—are the disintegration of communities and the disintegration of persons. That these two are related (that private loneliness, for instance, will necessarily accompany public confusion) is clear enough. And I take for granted that most people have explored in themselves and their surroundings some of the intricacies of the practical causes and effects; most of us, for example, have understood that the results are usually bad when people act in social or moral isolation, and also when, because of such isolation, they fail to act.

What seems not so well understood, because not enough examined, is the relation between these disintegrations and the disintegration of language. My impression is that we have seen, for perhaps a hundred and fifty years, a gradual increase in language that is either meaningless or destructive of meaning. And I believe that this increasing unreliability of language parallels the increasing disintegration, over the same period, of persons and communities.

My concern is for the *accountability* of language—hence, of the users of language. To deal with this matter I will use a pair of economic concepts: *internal accounting*, which considers costs and benefits in reference only to the interest of the money-making enterprise itself; and *external accounting*, which considers the costs and benefits to the "larger community." By altering the application of these terms a little, any statement may be said to account well or poorly for what is going on inside the speaker, or outside him, or both.

It will be found, I believe, that the accounting will be poor—incomprehensible or unreliable—if it attempts to be purely internal or purely external. One of the primary obligations of language is to connect and balance the two kinds of accounting.

And so, in trying to understand the degeneracy of language, it is

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necessary to examine, not one kind of unaccountability, but two complementary kinds. There is language that is diminished by subjectivity, which ends in meaninglessness. But that kind of language rarely exists alone (or so I believe), but is accompanied, in a complex relationship of both cause and effect, by a language diminished by objectivity, or so-called "objectivity" (inordinate or irresponsible ambition), which ends in confusion.

My standpoint here is defined by the assumption that no statement is complete or comprehensible in itself, that in order for a statement to be complete and comprehensible three conditions are required:

1. It must designate its object precisely.
2. Its speaker must stand by it: must believe it, be accountable for it, be willing to act on it.
3. This relation of speaker, word, and object must be conventional; the community must know what it is.

These are still the common assumptions of private conversations. In our ordinary dealings with each other, we take for granted that we cannot understand what is said if we cannot assume the accountability of the speaker, the accuracy of his speech, and mutual agreement on the structures of language and the meanings of words. We assume, in short, that language is communal, and that its purpose is to tell the truth.

That these common assumptions are becoming increasingly uncommon, particularly in the discourse of specialists of various sorts, is readily evident to anyone looking for evidence. How far they have passed from favor among specialists of language, to use the handiest example, is probably implicit in the existence of such specialists; one could hardly become a language specialist (a "scientist" of language) so long as one adhered to the old assumptions.

But the influence of these specialists is, of course, not confined to the boundaries of their specialization. They write textbooks for people who are not specialists of language, but who are apt to become specialists of other kinds. The general drift of the purpose of at least some of these specialists, and its conformability to the purposes of specialists of other kinds, is readily suggested by a couple of recently published textbooks for freshman English.

One of these, *The Contemporary Writer*, by W. Ross Winterowd,[1]

[1] Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1975, pages 291–303, 235.

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contains a chapter on language, the main purpose of which is to convince the student of the illegitimate tyranny of any kind of prescriptive grammar and of the absurdity of judging language "on the basis of extra-linguistic considerations." This chapter proposes four rules that completely overturn all the old common assumptions:

1. "Languages apparently do not become better or worse in any sense. They simply change."
2. "Language is arbitrary."
3. "Rightness and wrongness are determined . . . by the purpose for which the language is being used, by the audience at which it is directed, and by the situation in which the use is taking place."
4. ". . . a grammar of a language is a description of that language, nothing more and nothing less."

And these rules have a pair of corollaries that Mr. Winterowd states plainly. One is that "you [the freshman student] have a more or less complete mastery of the English language . . ." The other is that art—specifically, here, the literary art—is "the highest expression of the human need to play, of the desire to escape from the world of reality into the world of fantasy."

The second of these texts, *Rhetoric: Discovery and Change*, by Richard E. Young, Alton L. Becker, and Kenneth L. Pike,[2] takes the standardless functionalism of Winterowd's understanding of language and applies it to the use of language. "The ethical dimension of the art of rhetoric," these authors say, is in "the attempt to reduce another's sense of threat in the effort to reach the goal of cooperation and mutual benefit . . ." They distinguish between evaluative writing and descriptive writing, preferring the latter because evaluative writing tends to cause people "to become defensive," whereas "a description . . . does not make judgments . . ." When, however, a writer "must make judgments, he can make them in a way that minimizes the reader's sense of threat." Among other things, "he can acknowledge the personal element in his judgment. . . . There is a subtle but important difference between saying 'I don't like it' and 'It's bad.' "

The authors equate evaluation—functionally, at least—with dogmatism: "The problem with dogmatism is that, like evaluation, it forces the reader to take sides." And finally they recommend a variety of writing which they call "provisional" because it "focuses

[2] Harcourt, Brace & World, 1970, pages 8, 203–211.

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on the process of enquiry itself and acknowledges the tentative nature of conclusions. . . . Provisional writing implies that more than one reasonable conclusion is possible."

The first of these books attempts to make the study of language an "objective" science by eliminating from that study all extra-linguistic values and the issue of quality. Mr. Winterowd asserts that "the language grows according to its own dynamics." He does not say, apparently because he does not believe, that its dynamics includes the influence of the best practice. There is no "best." Anyone who speaks English is a "master" of the language. And the writers once acknowledged as masters of English are removed from "the world of reality" to the "world of fantasy," where they lose their force within the dynamics of the growth of language. Their works are reduced to the feckless status of "experiences": "we are much more interested in the imaginative statement of the message . . . than we are in the message . . . " Mr. Winterowd's linguistic "science" thus views language as an organism that has evolved without reference to habitat. Its growth has been "arbitrary," without any principle of selectivity.

Against Mr. Winterowd's definition of literature, it will be instructive to place a definition by Gary Snyder, who says of poetry that it is "a tool, a net or trap to catch and present; a sharp edge; a medicine, or the little awl that unties knots."[3] It will be quickly observed that this sentence enormously complicates Mr. Winterowd's simplistic statement-message dichotomy. What Mr. Winterowd means by "message" is an "idea" written in the dullest possible prose. His book is glib, and glibness is an inescapable doom of language without standards. One of the great practical uses of the literary disciplines, of course, is to resist glibness—to slow language down and make it thoughtful. This accounts, particularly, for the influence of verse, in its formal aspect, within the dynamics of the growth of language: verse checks the merely impulsive flow of speech, subjects it to another pulse, to measure, to extra-linguistic consideration; by inducing the hesitations of difficulty, it admits into language the influence of the Muse and of musing.

The three authors of the second book attempt to found an ethics of rhetoric on the idea expressed in one of Mr. Winterowd's rules: "Rightness and wrongness are determined" by purpose, audience, and situation. This idea apparently derives from, though it signifi-

[3] "Poetry, Community, & Climax," *Field* 20, Spring 1979, p. 29.

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cantly reduces, the ancient artistic concern for propriety or decorum. A part of this concern was indeed the fittingness of the work to its occasion: that is, one would not write an elegy in the meter of a drinking song—though that is putting it too plainly, for the sense of occasion exercised an influence both broad and subtle on form, diction, syntax, small points of grammar and prosody—everything. But occasion, as I understand it, was invariably second in importance to the subject. It is only the modern specialist who departs from this. The specialist poet, for instance, degrades the subject to "subject matter" (raw material), so that the subject exists for the poem's sake, is *subjected* to the poem, in the same way as industrial specialists see trees or ore-bearing rocks as raw material subjected to their manufactured end-products. Quantity thus begins to dominate the work of the specialist poet at its very source. Like an industrialist, he is interested in the subjects of the world for the sake of what they can be made to produce. He mines his experience for subject matter. The first aim of the propriety of the old poets, by contrast, was to make the language true to its subject—to see that it told the truth. That is why they invoked the Muse. The truth the poet chose as his subject was perceived as *superior* to his powers—and, by clear implication, to his occasion and purpose. But the aim of truth-telling is not stated in either of these textbooks. The second, in fact, makes an "ethical" aim of avoiding the issue, for, as the authors say, coining a formidable truth: "Truth has become increasingly elusive and men are driven to embrace conflicting ideologies."

This sort of talk about language, it seems to me, is fundamentally impractical. It does not propose as an outcome any fidelity between words and speakers or words and things or words and acts. It leads instead to muteness and paralysis. So far as I can tell, it is unlikely that one can speak at all, in even the most casual conversation, without some informing sense of what would be best to say—that is, without some sort of *standard.* And I do not believe that it is possible to act on the basis of a "tentative" or "provisional" conclusion. We may know that we are forming a conclusion on the basis of provisional or insufficient knowledge—that is a part of what we understand as the tragedy of our condition. But we must act, nevertheless, on the basis of *final* conclusions, because we know that actions, occurring in time, are irrevocable. That is another part of our tragedy. People who make a conventional agreement that all conclusions are provisional—a convention almost in-

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variably implied by academic uses of the word "objectivity"—characteristically talk but do not act. Or they do not act deliberately, though time and materiality carry them into action of a sort, willy-nilly.

And there are times, according to the only reliable ethics we have, when one is required to tell the truth, whatever the urgings of purpose, audience, and situation. Ethics requires this because, in the terms of the practical realities of our lives, the truth is safer than falsehood. To ignore this is simply to put language at the service of purpose—*any* purpose. It is, in terms of the most urgent realities of our own time, to abet a dangerous confusion between public responsibility and public relations. Remote as these theories of language are from practical contexts, they are nevertheless serviceable to expedient practices.

In affirming that there is a necessary and indispensable connection between language and truth, and therefore between language and deeds, I have certain precedents in mind. I begin with the Christian idea of the Incarnate Word, the Word entering the world as flesh, and inevitably therefore as action—which leads logically enough to the insistence in the Epistle of James that faith without works is dead:

> For if any be a hearer of the word, and not a doer, he is like unto a man beholding his natural face in a glass:
> For he beholdeth himself, and goeth his way, and straightway forgetteth what manner of man he was.[4]

I also have in mind the Confucian insistence on sincerity (precision) and on fidelity between speaker and word as essentials of political health: "Honesty is the treasure of states." I have returned to Ezra Pound's observation that Confucius "collected *The Odes* to keep his followers from abstract discussion. That is, *The Odes* give particular instances. They do not lead to exaggerations of dogma."[5]

And I have remembered from somewhere Thoreau's sentence: "Where would you look for standard English but to the words of a standard man?"

The idea of standing by one's word, of words precisely designating things, of deeds faithful to words, is probably native to our un-

[4] 1: 23 & 24.
[5] *Confucius*, New Directions, 1951, pages 89, 191.

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derstanding. Indeed, it seems doubtful whether without that idea we could understand anything.

But in order to discover what makes language that can be understood, stood by, and acted on, it is necessary to return to my borrowed concepts of internal and external accounting. And it will be useful to add two further precedents.

In *Mind and Nature*, Gregory Bateson writes that "'things' [his quotation marks] can only enter the world of communication and meaning by their names, their qualities and their attributes (i.e., by reports of their internal and external relations and interactions)."[6]

And Gary Snyder, in a remarkably practical or practicable or practice-able definition of where he takes his stand, makes the poet responsible for "possibilities opening both inward and outward."[7]

There can be little doubt, I think, that any accounting that is *purely* internal will be incomprehensible. If the connection between inward and outward is broken—if, for instance, the experience of a single human does not resonate within the common experience of humanity—then language fails. In *The Family Reunion*, Harry says: "I talk in general terms / Because the particular has no language."[8] But he speaks, too, in despair, having no hope that his general terms can communicate the particular burden of his experience. We readily identify this loneliness of personal experience as "modern." Many poems of our century have this loneliness, this failure of speech, as a subject; many more exhibit it as a symptom.

But it begins at least as far back as Shelley, in such lines as these from "Stanzas Written in Dejection, Near Naples":

> Alas! I have nor hope nor health,
> Nor peace within nor calm around,
> Nor that content surpassing wealth
> The sage in meditation found,
> And walked with inward glory crowned—
> Nor fame, nor power, nor love, nor leisure.
> . . . .
> I could lie down like a tired child,
> And weep away the life of care
> Which I have borne and yet must bear,
> Till death like sleep might steal on me . . .

[6] E. P. Dutton, 1979, page 61.
[7] *Op. cit.*, p. 21.
[8] T. S. Eliot, *The Complete Poems and Plays*, Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1952, p. 235.

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This too is an example of particular experience concealing itself in "general terms"—though here the failure, if it was suspected, is not acknowledged. The generality of the language does not objectify it, but seals it in its subjectivity. In reading this—as, I think, in reading a great many poems of our own time—we sooner or later realize that we are reading a "complaint" that we do not credit or understand. If we fail to realize this, it is because we have departed from the text of the poem, summoning particularities of our own experience in support of Shelley's general assertions. The fact remains that Shelley's poem doesn't tell us what he is complaining about; his lines fail to "create the object [here, the experience] which they contemplate."[9] This failure is implicitly conceded by the editors of *The Norton Anthology of English Literature*, who felt it necessary to provide the following footnote:

> Shelley's first wife, Harriet, had drowned herself; Clara, his baby daughter by Mary Shelley, had just died; and Shelley himself was plagued by ill health, pain, financial worries, and the sense that he had failed as a poet.[10]

But I think the poem itself calls attention to the failure by its easy descent into self-pity, finally asserting that "I am one / Whom men love not . . . " Language that becomes too subjective lacks currency, to use another economic metaphor; it will not pass. Self-pity, like bragging, will not pass. The powers of language are used illegitimately, to impose, rather than to elicit, the desired response.

Shelley is not writing gibberish here. It is possible to imagine that someone who does not dislike this poem may see in it a certain beauty. But it is the sickly beauty of generalized emotionalism. For once precision is abandoned as a linguistic or literary virtue, vague generalization is one of two remaining possibilities, gibberish being the second.

It is true, in a sense, that "the particular has no language"—that at least in public writing, and in speech passing between strangers, there may be only degrees of generalization. But there are, I think, two kinds of precision that are particular and particularizing. There is, first, the precision in the speech of people who share the same knowledge of place and history and work. This is the precision of direct reference or designation. It sounds like this: "How

[9] T. S. Eliot, *Selected Essays*, Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1950, page 269.
[10] W. W. Norton & Company, Volume 2, 1962, pages 418–419.

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about letting me borrow your tall jack?" Or: "The old hollow beech blew down last night." Or, beginning a story, "Do you remember that time . . . ?" I would call this community speech. Its words have the power of pointing to things visible either to eyesight or to memory. Where it is not too much corrupted by public or media speech, this community speech is wonderfully vital. Because it so often works designatively it *has* to be precise, and its precisions are formed by persistent testing against its objects.

This community speech, unconsciously taught and learned, in which words live in the presence of their objects, is the very root and foundation of language. It is the source, the unconscious inheritance that is carried, both with and without schooling, into consciousness—but never *all* the way, and so it remains rich, mysterious, and enlivening. Cut off from this source, language becomes a paltry work of conscious purpose, at the service and the mercy of expedient aims. Theories such as those underlying the two textbooks I have discussed seem to be attempts to detach language from its source in communal experience, by making it arbitrary in origin and provisional in use. And this may be a "realistic" way of "accepting" the degradation of community life. The task, I think, is hopeless, and it shows the extremes of futility that academic specialization can lead to. If one wishes to promote the life of language, one must promote the life of a community—a discipline many times more trying, difficult, and long than that of linguistics, but having at least the virtue of hopefulness. It escapes the despair always implicit in specializations: the cultivation of discrete parts without respect or responsibility for the whole.

The other sort of precision—the sort available to public speech or writing as well as to community speech—is a precision that comes of tension either between a statement and a prepared context or, within a single statement, between more or less conflicting feelings or ideas. Shelley's complaint is incomprehensible not just because it is set in "general terms," but because the generalities are too simple. One doesn't credit the emotion of the poem because it is too purely mournful. We are—conventionally, maybe, but also properly—unprepared to believe without overpowering evidence that things are *all* bad. Self-pity may deal in such absolutes of feeling, but we don't deal with other people in the manner of self-pity.

Another general complaint about mortality is given in Act V, Scene 2, of *King Lear*, when Edgar says to Gloucester: "Men must endure / Their going hence, even as their coming hither." Out of context this statement is even more general than Shelley's. It is, un-

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like Shelley's, deeply moving because it is tensely poised within a narrative context that makes it precise. We know exactly, for instance, what is meant by that "must": a responsible performance is required until death. But the complaint is followed immediately by a statement of another kind, forcing the speech of the play back into its action: "Ripeness is all. Come on."

Almost the same thing is done in a single line of Robert Herrick, in the tension between the complaint of mortality and the jaunty metric:

> Out of the world he must, who once comes in . . .

Here the very statement of inevitable death sings its acceptability. How would you divide, there, the "statement of the message" from "the message"?

And see how the tension between contradictory thoughts particularizes the feeling in these three lines by John Dryden:

> Old as I am, for ladies' love unfit,
> The pow'r of beauty I remember yet,
> Which once inflamed my soul, and still inspires my wit.

These last three examples immediately receive our belief and sympathy because they satisfy our sense of the complexity, the cross-graining, of real experience. In them, an inward possibility is made to open outward. Internal accounting has made itself externally accountable.

Shelley's poem, on the other hand, exemplifies the solitude of inward experience that continues with us, both in and out of poetry. I don't pretend to understand all the causes and effects of this, but I will offer the opinion that one of its chief causes is a simplistic idea of "freedom," which also continues with us, and is also to be found in Shelley. At the end of Act III of *Prometheus Unbound*, we are given this vision of a liberated humanity:

> The loathsome mask has fallen, the man remains
> Sceptreless, free, uncircumscribed, but man
> Equal, unclassed, tribeless, and nationless,
> Exempt from awe, worship, degree, the king
> Over himself . . .

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This passage, like the one from the "Stanzas Written in Dejection," is vague enough, and for the same reason; as the first hastened to emotional absolutes, this hastens to an absolute idea. It is less a vision of a free man than a vision of a definition of a free man. But Shelley apparently did not notice that this headlong scramble of adjectives, though it may produce one of the possible definitions of a free man, also defines a lonely one, unattached and displaced. This free man is described as loving, and love is an emotion highly esteemed by Shelley. But it is, like his misery, a "free" emotion, detached and absolute. In this same passage of *Prometheus Unbound*, he calls it "the nepenthe, love"—love forgetful, or inducing forgetfulness, of grief or pain.

Shelley thought himself, particularly in *Prometheus Unbound*, a follower of Milton—an assumption based on a misunderstanding of *Paradise Lost*. And so it is instructive in two ways to set beside Shelley's definition of freedom, this one by Milton:

> To be free is precisely the same thing as to be pious, wise, just, and temperate, careful of one's own, abstinent from what is another's, and thence, in fine, magnanimous and brave.[11]

And Milton's definition, like the lines previously quoted from Shakespeare, Herrick, and Dryden, derives its precision from tension: he defines freedom in terms of responsibilities. And it is only this tension that can suggest the possibility of *living* (for any length of time) in freedom—just as it is the tension between love and pain that suggests the possibility of carrying love into acts. Shelley's freedom defined in terms of freedom, gives us only this from a "Chorus of Spirits" in Act IV, Scene I, of *Prometheus Unbound*:

> Our task is done,
> We are free to dive, or soar, or run;
> Beyond and around,
> Or within the bound
> Which clips the world with darkness round.
>
> We'll pass the eyes
> Of the starry skies
> Into the hoar deep to colonize . . .

[11] *Second Defense of the People of England, The Works of John Milton,* Vol. VIII, Columbia University Press, 1933, pages 249–251.

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Which, as we will see, has more in common with the technological romanticism of Buckminster Fuller than with anything in Milton.

In supposed opposition to this remote subjectivity of internal accounting, our age has developed a stance or state of mind which it calls "objective," and which produces a kind of accounting supposed to be external—that is, free from personal biases and considerations. This objective mentality, within the safe confines of its various specialized disciplines, operates with great precision and confidence. It follows tested and trusted procedures, and uses a professional language which an outsider must assume to be a very exact code. When this language is used by its accustomed speakers on their accustomed ground, even when one does not understand it, it clearly voices the implication of a control marvelously precise over objective reality. It is only when it is overheard in confrontation with failure that this implication falters, and the adequacy of this sort of language comes in doubt.

The transcribed conversations of the members of the Nuclear Regulatory Commission during the crisis of Three Mile Island[12] provide a valuable exhibit of the limitations of one of these objective languages. At one point, for example, the commissioners received a call from Roger Mattson, Nuclear Reactor Regulation chief of systems safety. He said, among other things, the following:

> That bubble will be 5,000 cubic feet. The available volume in the upper head and the candy canes, that's the hot legs, is on the order of 2,000 cubic feet total. I get 3,000 excess cubic feet of noncondensibles. I've got a horse race. . . . We have got every systems engineer we can find . . . thinking the problem: how the hell do we get the noncondensibles out of there, do we win the horse race or do we lose the horse race.

At another time the commissioners were working to "engineer a press release," of which "The focus . . . has to be reassuring . . . " Commissioner Ahearne apparently felt that it was a bit *too* reassuring, and he would like it to *suggest* the possibility of a bad outcome, apparently a meltdown. He says:

> I think it would be technically a lot better if you said—something about there's a possibility—it's small, but, it could lead to serious problems.

[12] I am indebted, for a useful sampling from these transcripts and a perceptive commentary on them, to Paul Trachtman, "Phenomena, comment, and notes," *Smithsonian*, July 1979, pages 14–16.

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And, a few sentences later, Commissioner Kennedy tells him:

> Well I understand what you're saying. . . . You could put a little sentence in right there . . . to say, were this—in the unlikely event that this occurred, increased temperatures would result and possible further fuel damage.

What is remarkable, and frightening, about this language is its inability to admit what it is talking about. Because these specialists have routinely eliminated themselves, as such and as representative human beings, from consideration, according to the prescribed "objectivity" of their discipline, they cannot bring themselves to acknowledge to each other, much less to the public, that their problem involves an extreme danger to a lot of people. Their subject, as bearers of a public trust, is this danger, and it can be nothing else. It is a technical problem least of all. And yet when their language approaches this subject, it either diminishes it, or dissolves into confusions of syntax or purpose. Mr. Mattson speaks clearly and coherently enough so long as numbers and the jargon of "candy canes" and "hot legs" are adequate to his purpose. But as soon as he tries to communicate his sense of the urgency of the problem, his language collapses into a kind of rant around the metaphor of "a horse race." And the two commissioners, struggling with their obligation to inform the public of the possibility of a disaster, find themselves virtually languageless—without the necessary words and with only the shambles of a syntax. They cannot say what they are talking about. And so their obligation to *inform* becomes a tongue-tied—and therefore surely futile—effort to *reassure.* Public responsibility becomes public relations, apparently, for want of a language adequately responsive to its subject.

So inept is the speech of these commissioners that we must deliberately remind ourselves that they are not stupid, and are probably not amoral. They are highly trained, intelligent, worried men, whose understanding of language is by now to a considerable extent a public one. They are atomic scientists whose criteria of language are identical to those of at least some linguistic scientists. They determine the correctness of their statement to the press exactly according to Mr. Winterowd's rule: by their purpose, audience, and situation. Their language is governed by the ethical aim prescribed by the three authors of *Rhetoric: Discovery and Change*: they wish above all to speak in such a way as to "reduce another's sense of threat." But the result was not "cooperation and mutual

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benefit"; it was incoherence and dishonesty, leading to public suspicion, distrust, and fear.

This is language diminished by inordinate ambition: the taking of more power than can be responsibly or beneficently held. It is perhaps a law of human nature that such ambition always produces a confusion of tongues:

> And they said, Go to, let us build us a city and a tower, whose top may reach unto heaven; and let us make us a name, lest we be scattered . . .
> . . . .
> And the Lord said . . . now nothing will be restrained from them, which they have imagined to do.
> Go to, let us go down, and there confound their language, that they may not understand one another's speech.[13]

The professed aim is to bring people together—usually for the implicit, though unstated, purpose of subjecting them to some public power or project. Why else would rulers seek to "unify" people? The idea is to cause them to speak the same language—meaning either that they will agree with the government or be quiet, as in communist and fascist states, or that they will politely ignore their disagreements or disagree "provisionally," as in American universities. But the result—though power may survive for a while in spite of it—is confusion and dispersal. Real language, real discourse are destroyed. People lose understanding of each other, are divided and scattered. Speech of whatever kind begins to resemble the speech of drunkenness or madness.

What this dialogue of the NRC commissioners causes one to suspect—and I believe the suspicion is confirmed by every other such exhibit I have seen—is that there is simply no such thing as an accounting that is *purely* external. The notion that external accounting can be accomplished by "objectivity" is an illusion. Apparently the only way to free the accounting of what is internal to people, or subjective, is to make it internal to (that is, subject to) some other entity or structure just as limiting, or more so—as the commissioners attempted to deal with a possible public catastrophe in terms either of nuclear technology or of public relations. The only thing really externalized by such accounting is a bad result that one does not wish to pay for.

And so external accounting, alone, is only another form of inter-

[13] Genesis 11:1–9.

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nal accounting. The only difference is that this "objective" accounting does pretty effectively rule out personal considerations *of a certain kind.* (It does *not* rule out the personal desire for wealth, power, or intellectual certainty.) Otherwise, the talk of the commissioners and the lines from "Stanzas Written in Dejection" are equally and similarly incomprehensible. The languages of both are obviously troubled, we recognize the words, and learn something about the occasions, but we cannot learn from the language itself exactly what the trouble is. The commissioners' language cannot define the problem of their public responsibility, and Shelley's does not develop what I suppose should be called the narrative context of his emotion, which therefore remains incommunicable.

Moreover, these two sorts of accounting, so long as they remain discrete, both work to keep the problem abstract, all in the mind. They are both, in different ways, internal to the mind. The real occasions of the problems are not admitted into consideration. In Shelley's poem, this may be caused by a despairing acceptance of loneliness. In the NRC deliberations it is caused, I think, by fear; the commissioners take refuge in the impersonality of technological procedures. They cannot bear to acknowledge considerations and feelings that might break the insulating spell of their "objective" dispassion.

Or, to put it another way, their language and their way of thought make it possible for them to think of the crisis only as a technical event or problem. Even a meltdown is fairly understandable and predictable within the terms of their expertise. What is unthinkable is the evacuation of a massively populated region. It is the disorder, confusion, and uncertainty of that exodus that they cannot face. The one is, in Mr. Mattson's phrase, "a failure mode that has never been studied." The other is forty years—or forty centuries—in the wilderness. In dealing with the unstudied failure mode, the commissioners' minds do not have to leave their meeting room. It is an *internal* problem. The other, the human, possibility, if they were really to deal with it, would send them shouting into the streets. Even worse, perhaps, from the point of view of their discipline, it would force them to face the absurdity of the idea of "emergency planning"—the idea, in other words, of a controlled catastrophe. They would have to admit, against all the claims of professional standing and job security, that the only way to control the danger of a nuclear power plant is not to build it.

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That is to say, if they had a language strong and fine enough to consider *all* the considerations, it would tend to force them out of the confines of "objective" thought and into action, out of solitude into community.

It is the *purity* of objective thought that finally seduces and destroys it. The same thing happens, it seems to me, to the subjective mind. For certain emotions, especially the extremely subjective ones of self-pity and self-love, isolation holds a strong enticement: it offers to keep them pure and neat, aloof from the disorderliness and the mundane obligations of the human common ground.

The only way, so far as I can see, to achieve an accounting that is verifiably and reliably external is to admit the internal, the personal, as an appropriate, necessary consideration. If the NRC commissioners, for example, had spoken a good common English, instead of the languages of their specialization and of public relations, then they might have spoken of their personal anxiety and bewilderment, and so brought into consideration what they had in common with the people whose health and lives they were responsible for. They might, in short, have sympathized openly with those people—and so have understood the probably unbearable burden of their public trusteeship.

To be bound within the confines of either the internal or the external way of accounting is to be diseased. To hold the two in balance is to validate both kinds, and to have health. I am not using these terms "disease" and "health" according to any clinical definitions, but am speaking simply from my own observation that when my awareness of how I feel overpowers my awareness of where I am and who is there with me, I am sick, dis-eased. This can be appropriately extended to say that if what I think obscures my sense of whereabouts and company, I am diseased. And the converse is also true: I am diseased if I become so aware of my surroundings that my own inward life is obscured, as if I should so fix upon the value of some mineral in the ground as to forget that the world is God's work and my home.

But still another example is necessary, and other terms.

In an article entitled "The Evolution and Future of American Animal Agriculture," G. W. Salisbury and R. G. Hart[14] consider the transformation of American agriculture "from an art form into a science." The difference, they say, is that the art of agriculture is

[14] *Perspectives in Biology and Medicine*, Spring 1979, pages 394–409.

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concerned "only" with the "how . . . of farming," whereas the science is interested in the "whys."

As an example—or, as they say, a "reference index"—of this change, the authors use the modern history of milk production: the effort, from their point of view entirely successful, "to change the dairy cow from the family companion animal she became after domestication and through all of man's subsequent history into an appropriate manufacturing unit of the twentieth century for the efficient transformation of unprocessed feed into food for man."

The authors produce "two observations" about this change, and these constitute their entire justification of it:

> First, the total cow population was reduced in the period 1944 through 1975 by 67 percent, but second, the yield per cow during the same period increased by 60 percent. In practical terms, the research that yielded such dramatic gains produced a savings for the American public as a whole of approximately 50 billion pounds of total digestible nitrogen per year in the production of a relatively constant level of milk.

The authors proceed to work this out in dollar values, and to say that the quantity of saved dollars finally "gets to the point that people simply do not believe it." And later they say that, in making this change, "The major disciplines were genetics, reproduction, and nutrition."

This is obviously a prime example of internal accounting in the economic sense. The external account is not fully renderable; the context of the accounting is vast, some quantities are not known, and some of the costs are not quantifiable. However, there can be no question that the externalized costs are large. The net gain is not, as these authors imply, identical with the gross. And the industrialization of milk production is a part of a much larger enterprise that may finally produce a highly visible, if not entirely computable, net loss.

At least two further observations are necessary:

1. The period, 1944–1975, also saw a drastic decrease in the number of dairies, by reason of the very change cited by Salisbury and Hart. The smaller—invariably the smaller—dairies were forced out because of the comparative "inefficiency" of their "manufacturing units." Their failure was part of a major population shift, which seriously disrupted the life both of the country communities and of the cities, broke down traditional community forms, and so on.

2. The industrialization of agriculture, of which the industrial-

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ization of milk production is a part, has caused serious problems that even agricultural specialists are beginning to recognize: soil erosion, soil compaction, chemical poisoning and pollution, energy shortages, several kinds of money troubles, obliteration of plant and animal species, disruption of soil biology.

Both the human and the agricultural/ecological costs are obviously great. Some of them have begun to force their way into the accounts, and are straining the economy. Others are, and are likely to remain, external to all ledgers.

The passages I have quoted from Professors Salisbury and Hart provide a very neat demonstration of the shift from a balanced internal-external accounting (the dairy cow as "family companion animal") to a so-called "objective" accounting (the dairy cow as "appropriate manufacturing unit of the twentieth century"), which is, in fact, internal to an extremely limited definition of agricultural progress.

The discarded language, oddly phrased though it is, comes close to a kind of accountability: the internal (family) and the external (cow) are joined by a moral connection (companionship). A proof of its accountability is that this statement can be the basis of moral behavior: "Be good to the cow, for she is our companion."

The preferred phrase—"appropriate manufacturing unit of the twentieth century"—has nothing of this accountability. One can say, of course: "Be good to the cow, for she is productive (or expensive)." But that could be said of a machine; it takes no account of the cow as a living, much less a fellow, creature. But the phrase is equally unaccountable as language. "Appropriate" to what? Though the authors write "appropriate . . . of the twentieth century," they may mean "appropriate . . . *to* the twentieth century." But are there are no families and no needs for companionship with animals in the twentieth century? Or perhaps they mean "appropriate . . . for the efficient transformation of unprocessed feed into food for man." But the problem remains. Who is this "man"? Someone, perhaps, who needs no companionship with family or animals? We are constrained to suppose so, for "objectivity" has apparently eliminated "family" and "companion" as terms subject to personal bias—perhaps as "merely sentimental." By the terms of this "objective" accounting, then, "man" is a creature who needs to eat, and who is for some unspecified reason more important than a cow. But for a reader who considers himself a "man" by any broader definition, this language is virtually meaningless. Because the terms of personal bias (that is, the terms of *value*) have been

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eliminated, the terms of judgment ("appropriate" and "efficient") mean nothing. The authors' conditions would be just as well satisfied if the man produced the milk and the cow bought it, or if a machine produced it and a machine bought it.

Sense, and the possibility of sense, break down here because too much that clearly belongs in has been left out. Like the NRC commissioners, Salisbury and Hart have eliminated themselves as representative human beings, and they go on to eliminate the cow as a representative animal—all "interests" are thus removed from the computation. With apparently rigorous scrupulosity they pluck out the representative or symbolic terms in order to achieve a pristinely "objective" accounting of the performance of a "unit." And so we are astonished to discover, at the end of this process, that they have complacently allowed the dollar to stand as representative of *all* value. What announced itself as a statement about animal agriculture has become, by way of several obscure changes of subject, a crudely simplified statement about industrial economics. This is not, in any respectable sense, language, or thought, or even computation. Like the textbooks I have discussed, and like the dialogue of the NRC, it is a pretentious and dangerous deception, forgiveable only insofar as it may involve self-deception.

If we are to begin to make a reliable account of it, this recent history of milk production must be seen as occurring within a system of nested systems. This system might be suggested by a sketch of five concentric circles, with the innermost representing the individual human, the second representing the family, the third the community, the fourth agriculture, and the outermost and largest representing nature. So long as the smaller systems are enclosed within the larger, and so long as all are connected by complex patterns of interdependency, as we know they are, then whatever affects one system will affect the others.

It seems that this system of systems is safe so long as each system is controlled by the next larger one. If at any point the hierarchy is reversed, the destruction of the entire system begins. This system of systems is perhaps an updated, ecological version of the Great Chain of Being. That is, it may bring us back to a hierarchical structure not too different from the one that underlies *Paradise Lost*—a theory of the form of Creation which is at the same time a moral form, and which is violated by the "disobedience" or *hubris* of attempting to rise and take power above one's proper place.

But the sketch I have made of the system of systems is much too

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crude, for the connections between systems, insofar as this is a human structure, are not "given" or unconscious or automatic, but involve disciplines. Persons are joined to families, families to communities, etc., by disciplines that must be deliberately made, remembered, taught, learned, and practiced.

The system of systems begins to disintegrate when the hierarchy is reversed because that begins the disintegration of the connecting disciplines. Disciplines, typically, degenerate into professions, professions into careers. The accounting of Salisbury and Hart is defective because it upsets the hierarchies and so, perhaps unwittingly, fails to consider all the necessary considerations. They do present their "reference index" as occurring within a system of systems—but a drastically abbreviated one, which involves a serious distortion. In a graph of this system, the innermost circle represents the dairyman, the second the dairy, the third agriculture, and the fourth—which contains the first three—represents economics. Two things are wrong with this. First, too much has been left out. Second, the outer circle is too much within the interest of the inner. The dairyman is not *necessarily* under the control of simple greed—but this structure supplies no hint of a reason why he should not be.

The system of systems, as I first described it, involves three different kinds of interests:

1. The ontogenetic. This is self-interest and is at the center.

2. The phylogenetic. This is the interest that we would call "humanistic." It reaches through family and community and into agriculture. But it does not reach far enough into agriculture because, by its own terms, it cannot.

3. The ecogenetic. This is the interest of the whole "household" in which life is lived. (I don't know whether I invented this term or not. If I did, I apologize.)

These terms give us another way to characterize the flaw in the accounting of Salisbury and Hart. Their abbreviated system of systems fails either to assemble enough facts, to account fully for the meaning of the facts, or to provide any standard of judgment because the ontogenetic interest is both internal and external to it.

The system of systems, as I first sketched it, has this vulnerability: that the higher interests can be controlled or exploited by the lower simply by leaving things out—a procedure just as available to ignorance as to the highest cunning of "applied science." And given even the most generous motives, ignorance is always going to be involved.

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There is no reliable standard for behavior anywhere within the system of systems except truth. Lesser standards produce destruction—as, for example, the standards of public relations make gibberish of language.

The trouble, obviously, is that we do not know much of the truth. In particular, we know very little ecogenetic truth.

And so yet another term has to be introduced. The system of systems has to be controlled from above and outside. There has to be a religious interest of some kind above the ecogenetic. It will be sufficient to my purpose here just to say that the system of systems is enclosed within mystery, in which some truth can be known, but never all truth.

Neither the known truth nor the mystery is internal to any system. And here, however paradoxical it may seem, we begin to see a possibility of reliable accounting and of responsible behavior. The appropriateness of words or deeds can be determined only in reference to the whole "household" in which they occur. But this whole, as such, cannot enter into the accounting. (If it could, then the only necessary language would be mathematics, and the only necessary discipline would be military.) It can only come in as mystery: a factor of X which stands not for the unknown but the unknowable. This is an X that cannot be solved—which may be thought a disadvantage by some; its advantage is that, once it has been let into the account, it cannot easily be ignored. You cannot leave anything out of mystery, because by definition everything is always in it.

The practical use of religion, then, is to keep the accounting in as large a context as possible—to see, in fact, that the account is never "closed." Religion forces the accountant to reckon with mystery—the unsolvable X that keeps the debit and credit or cost and benefit columns open so that no "profit" can ever be safely declared. It forces the accounting outside of every enclosure that it might be internal to. Practically, this X means that all "answers" must be worked out within a limit of humility and restraint, so that the initiative to act would always imply a knowing acceptance of accountability for the results. The establishment and maintenance of this limit seems to me the ultimate empirical problem—the real "frontier" of science, or at least of the definition of the possibility of a *moral* science. It would place science under the rule of the old concern for propriety, correct proportion, proper scale—from which, in modern times, even the arts have been "liberated." That is, it would return to all work, artistic or scientific, the possi-

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bility of an external standard of quality. The quality of work or of a made thing would be determined by how conservingly it fitted into the system of systems. Judgment could then begin to articulate what is already obvious: that some work preserves the household of life, and some work destroys it. And thus a real liberation could take place: life and work could go free of those "professional standards" (and professional languages) that are invariably destructive of quality, because they always work as sheep's clothing for various kinds of ontogenetic motives. It is because of these professional standards that the industries and governments, while *talking* of the "betterment of the human condition," can *act* to enrich and empower themselves.

The connections within the system of systems are *practical* connections. The practicality consists in the realization that—despite the blandishments of the various short-circuited "professional" languages—you cannot speak or act in your own best interest without espousing and serving a higher interest. It is not knowledge that enforces this realization, but the humbling awareness of the insufficiency of knowledge, of mystery.

Applying then the standard of ecogenetic health to the work of Salisbury and Hart, we get a third way to describe its failure: it makes a principle of replacing the complex concern for quality ("how") with the drastically simplifying concern for quantity. Thus motive is entirely "liberated" from method: any way is good so long as it increases per unit production. But everything except production is diminished in the process, and Salisbury and Hart do not have a way of accounting for, hence no ability even to recognize, these diminishments. All that has been diminished could have been protected by a lively interest in the question of "how," which Salisbury and Hart—like the interests they are accounting for—ruled out at the beginning. They were nevertheless working under what I take to be a rule: When you subtract quality from quantity, the gross result is not a net gain.

And so a reliable account is personal at the beginning and religious at the end. This does not mean that a reliable account includes the whole system of systems, for no account can do that. It does mean that the account is made in precise reference to the system of systems—which is another way of saying that it is made in respect for it. Without this respect for the larger structures, the meaning shrinks into the confines of some smaller structure, and becomes special, partial, and destructive.

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It is this sort of external accounting that deals with connections, and thus inevitably raises the issue of quality. Which, I take it, is always the same as the issue of propriety: How appropriate is the tool to the work, the work to the need, the need to other needs and the needs of others and to the health of the household or community of all creatures?

And this kind of accounting gives us the great structures of poetry—as in Homer, Dante, and Milton. It is these great structures, I think, that carry us into the sense of being, in Gary Snyder's phrase, "at one with each other."[15] They teach us to imagine the life that is divided from us by difference or enmity: as Homer imagined the "enemy" hero, Hector; as Dante, on his pilgrimage to Heaven, imagined the damned; as Milton, in his awed study of the meaning of obedience, epitomized sympathetically in his Satan the disobedient personality. And as, now, ecological insight proposes again a poetry with the power to imagine the lives of animals and plants and streams and stones. And this imagining is eminently appropriate to the claims and privileges of the great household.

Unlike the problems of quantity, the problems of propriety are never "solved," but are ceaselessly challenging and interesting. This is the antidote to the romance of big technological solutions. Life would be interesting—there would be exciting work to do—even if there were no nuclear power plants or "agri-industries" or space adventures. The elaborations of elegance are at least as fascinating, and more various, more democratic, more healthy, more practical—though less glamorous—than the elaborations of power.

Without this ultimate reference to the system of systems, and this ultimate concern for quality, any rendering of account falls into the service of a kind of tyranny: it accompanies, and in one way or another invariably enables, the taking of power, from people first and last, but also from all other created things.

In this degenerative accounting, language is almost without the power of designation because it is used conscientiously to refer to nothing in particular. Attention rests upon percentages, categories, abstract functions. The reference drifts inevitably toward the merely provisional. It is not language that the user will likely be required to stand by or to act on, for it does not define any personal ground for standing or acting. Its only practical utility is to support with "expert opinion" a vast, impersonal technological action already begun. And it works directly against the conventionality,

[15] *Op. cit.*, page 34.

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the community life, of language, for it holds in contempt, not only all particular grounds of private fidelity and action, but the common ground of human experience, memory, and understanding from which language rises and on which meaning is shaped. It is a tyrannical language: tyrannese.

Do people come consciously to such language and to such implicit purpose? I hope not. I do not think so. It seems likely to me that, first, a certain kind of confusion must occur. It is a confusion about the human place in the universe, and it has been produced by diligent "educational" labors. This confusion is almost invariably founded on some romantic proposition about the "high destiny of man" or "unlimited human horizons." For an example I turn to R. Buckminster Fuller,[16] here defending the "cosmic realism" of space colonization:

> Conceptualizing realistically about humans as passengers on board 8,000-mile diameter Spaceship Earth traveling around the Sun at 60,000 miles an hour while flying formation with the Moon, which formation involves the 365 revolutions per each Sun circuit, and recalling that humans have always been born naked, helpless and ignorant though superbly equipped cerebrally, and endowed with hunger, thirst, curiosity and procreative instincts, it has been logical for humans to employ their minds' progressive discoveries of the cosmic principles governing all physical interattractions, interactions, reactions and intertransformings, and to use those principles in progressively organizing, to humanity's increasing advantage, the complex of cosmic principles interacting locally to produce their initial environment which most probably was that of a verdant south seas coral atoll—built by the coral on a volcano risen from ocean bottom ergo unoccupied by any animals, having only fish and birds as well as fruits, nuts and coconut milk.

That is a single sentence. I call attention not only to the vagueness and oversimplification of its generalities, but, more important, to the weakness of its grammar and the shapelessness and aimlessness of its syntax. The subject is an "it" of very tentative reference, buried in the middle of the sentence—an "it," moreover, that cannot possibly be the subject of the two complicated participial constructions that precede it. The sentence, then, begins with a dangling modifier half its length. On the other end, it peters out in a description of the biology of a coral atoll, the pertinence of which

[16] *Space Colonies*, edited by Stewart Brand, Penguin, 1977, page 55.

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is never articulated. In general, the sentence is a labyrinth of syntactical confusions impossible to map. When we reflect that "sentence" means, literally, "a way of thinking" (Latin: *sententia*) and that it comes from the Latin *sentire*, to feel, we realize that the concepts of sentence and sentence structure are not merely grammatical or merely academic—not negligible in any sense. A sentence is both the opportunity and the limit of thought—what we have to think with, and what we have to think in. It is, moreover, a *feelable* thought, a thought that impresses its sense not just on our understanding, but on our hearing, our sense of rhythm and proportion. It is a pattern of felt sense.

A sentence completely shapeless is therefore a loss of thought, an act of self-abandonment to incoherence. And indeed Mr. Fuller shows himself here a man who conceives a sentence, not as a pattern of thought apprehensible to sense, but merely as a clot of abstract concepts. In such a syntactical clot, words and concepts will necessarily tend to function abstractly rather than referentially. It is the statement of a man for whom words have replaced things, and who has therefore ceased to think particularly about any thing.

The idea buried in all those words is, so far as I can tell, a simple one: humans are born earth-bound, ignorant, and vulnerable, but intelligent; by their intelligence they lift themselves up from their primitive origin and move to fulfill their destiny. As we learn in later sentences, this destiny is universal in scope, limitless ("ever larger"), and humans are to approach it by larger and larger technology. The end is not stated, obviously, because it is not envisioned, because it is not envisionable. The idea, then, is that humans are extremely intelligent, and by the use of their technological genius they are on their way somewhere or other. It seems to me not unreasonable to suggest that the aimlessness, the limitlessness, of Mr. Fuller's idea produces the aimlessness and shapelessness of his sentence.

By contrast, consider another view of the human place in the universe, not a simple view or simply stated, but nevertheless comely, orderly, and clear:

> There wanted yet the Master work, the end
> Of all yet done; a Creature who not prone
> And Brute as other Creatures, but endu'd
> With Sanctity of Reason, might erect

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His Stature, and upright with Front serene
Govern the rest, self-knowing, and from thence
Magnanimous to correspond with Heav'n,
But grateful to acknowledge whence his good
Descends, thither with heart and voice and eyes
Directed in Devotion, to adore
And worship God Supreme . . . [17]

These lines of Milton immediately suggest what is wrong, first, with Mr. Fuller's sentence, and then with the examples of tyrannese that preceded it. They all assume that the human prerogative is unlimited, that we *must* do whatever we have the power to do. Specifically, what is lacking is the idea that humans have a place in Creation and that this place is limited by responsibility on the one hand and by humility on the other—or, in Milton's terms, by magnanimity and devotion. Without this precision of definition, this setting of bounds or ends to thought, we cannot mean, or say what we mean, or mean what we say; we cannot stand by our words because we cannot utter words that can be stood by; we cannot speak of our own actions as persons, or even as communities, but only of the actions of percentages, large organizations, concepts, historical trends, or the impersonal "forces" of destiny or evolution.

Or let us consider another pair of statements. The first, again from Buckminster Fuller, following the one just quoted, elaborates his theme of technological destiny:

> First the humans developed fish catching and carving tools, then rafts, dug-out canoes and paddles and then sailing outrigger canoes. Reaching the greater islands and the mainland they developed animal skin, grass and leafwoven clothing and skin tents. They gradually entered safely into geographical areas where they would previously have perished. Slowly they learned to tame, then breed, cows, bullocks, water buffalo, horses and elephants. Next they developed oxen, then horse-drawn vehicles, then horseless vehicles, then ships of the sky. Then employing rocketry and packaging up the essential life-supporting environmental constituents of the biosphere they made sorties away from their mothership Earth and finally ferried over to their Sun orbiting-companion, the Moon.

The other is from William Faulkner's story, "The Bear."[18] Isaac

[17] *Paradise Lost,* VII, 505–515.
[18] *Go Down, Moses,* The Modern Library, 1955, page 257.

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McCaslin is speaking of his relinquishment of the ownership of land:

> . . . He created the earth, made it and looked at it and said it was all right, and then He made man. He made the earth first and peopled it with dumb creatures, and then He created man to be His overseer on the earth and to hold suzerainty over the earth and the animals on it in His name, not to hold for himself and his descendants inviolable title forever, generation after generation, to the oblongs and squares of the earth, but to hold the earth mutual and intact in the communal anonymity of brotherhood, and all the fee He asked was pity and humility and sufferance and endurance and the sweat of his face for bread.

The only continuity recognized by Mr. Fuller is that of technological development, which is in fact not a continuity at all, for, as he sees it, it does not proceed by building on the past but by outmoding and replacing it. And if any other human concern accompanied the development from canoe to space ship, it is either not manifest to Mr. Fuller, or he does not think it important enough to mention.

The passage from Faulkner, on the other hand, cannot be understood except in terms of the historical and cultural continuity that produced it. It awakens our memory of Genesis and *Paradise Lost*, as *Paradise Lost* awakens our memory of Genesis. In each of these the human place in Creation is described as a moral circumstance, and this circumstance is understood each time, it seems to me, with a deeper sense of crisis, as history has proved humanity more and more the exploiter and destroyer of Creation rather than its devout suzerain or steward. Milton knew of the conquests of Africa and the Americas, the brutality of which had outraged the humane minds of Europe, providing occasion and incentive to raise again the question of the human place in Creation; and the devils of *Paradise Lost* are, among other things, conquistadors. (They are also the most expedient of politicians and technologists: " . . . by strength / They measure all . . . ") Faulkner's Isaac McCaslin, a white Mississippian of our own time, speaks not just with Milton's passion as a moral witness, but with the anguish of a man who inherits directly the guilt of the conqueror, the history of expropriation, despoliation, and slavery.

It is of the greatest importance to see how steadfastly this thrust of tradition, from Genesis to Milton to Faulkner, works toward the definition of personal place and condition, responsibility and action. And one feels the potency of this tradition to reach past the

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negativity of Isaac McCaslin's too simple relinquishment toward the definition of the atoning and renewing work that each person must do. Mr. Fuller's vision, by contrast, proposes that we have ahead of us only the next technological "breakthrough"—which, now that we have "progressed" to the scale of space ships, is not work for persons or communities, but for governments and corporations. What we have in these two statements is an open conflict between unlimited technology and traditional value. It is foolish to think that these two are compatible. Value and technology can meet only on the ground of restraint.

The technological determinists have tyrannical attitudes, and speak tyrannese, at least partly because their assumptions cannot produce a moral or a responsible definition of the human place in Creation. Because they assume that the human place is any place, they are necessarily confused about where they belong.

Where does this confusion come from? I think it comes from the specialization and abstraction of intellect, separating it from responsibility and humility, magnanimity and devotion, and thus giving it an importance that, in the order of things and in its own nature, it does not and cannot have. The specialized intellectual assumes, in other words, that intelligence is all in the mind. For illustration, I turn again to *Paradise Lost*, where Satan, fallen, boasts in "heroic" defiance that he has

> A mind not to be chang'd by Place or Time.
> The mind is its own place, and in itself
> Can make a Heav'n of Hell, a Hell of Heav'n,
> What matter where, if I be still the same . . .[19]

I do not know where one could find a better motto for the modernist or technological experiment, which assumes that we can fulfill a high human destiny any where, any way, so long as we can keep up the momentum of innovation; that the mind is "its own place" even within ecological degradation, pollution, poverty, hatred, and violence.

What we know, on the contrary, is that in any culture that could be called healthy or sane we find a much richer, larger concept of intelligence. We find, first, some way of acknowledging in action the existence of "higher intelligence." And we find that the human

[19] I, 253–256.

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mind, in such a culture, is invariably strongly *placed*, in reference to other minds in the community, in cultural memory and tradition, and in reference to earthly localities and landmarks. Intelligence survives both by internal coherence and external pattern; it is both inside and outside the mind. People are born both with and into intelligence. What is thought refers precisely to what is thought about. It is this outside intelligence that we are now ignoring and consequently destroying.

As industrial technology advances and enlarges, and in the process assumes greater social, economic, and political force, it carries people away from where they belong by history, culture, deeds, association, and affection. And it destroys the landmarks by which they might return. Often it destroys the nature or the character of the places they have left. The very possibility of a practical connection between thought and the world is thus destroyed. Culture is driven into the mind, where it cannot be preserved. Displaced memory, for instance, is hard to keep in mind, harder to hand down. The little that survives is attenuated—without practical force. That is why the Jews, in Babylon, wept when they remembered Zion. The mere memory of a place cannot preserve it, nor apart from the place itself can it long survive in the mind. "How shall we sing the Lord's song in a strange land?"

The enlargement of industrial technology is thus analogous to war. It continually requires the movement of knowledge and responsibility away from home. It thrives and burgeons upon the disintegration of homes, the subjugation of homelands. It requires that people cease to cooperate directly to fulfill local needs from local sources, and begin instead to deal with each other always across the rift that divides producer and consumer, and always competitively. The idea of the independence of individual farms, shops, communities, and households is anathema to industrial technologists. The rush to nuclear energy and the growth of the space colony idea are powered by the industrial will to cut off the possibility of a small-scale energy technology—which is to say the possibility of small-scale personal and community acts. The corporate producers and their sycophants in the universities and the government will do virtually anything (or so they have obliged us to assume) to keep people from acquiring necessities in any way except by *buying* them.

Industrial technology and its aspirations enlarge along a line described by changes of verb tense: I need this tool; I will need this

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tool; I would need that tool. The conditional verb rests by nature upon *ifs*. The ifs of technological rationalization (*if* there were sufficient demand, money, knowledge, energy, power) act as wedges between history and futurity, inside and outside, value and desire, and ultimately between people and the earth and between one person and another.

By such shifts in the tenses of thought (as sometimes also by the substitution of the indefinite for the definite article) it is possible to impair or destroy the power of language to designate, to shift the focus of reference from what is outside the mind to what is inside it. And thus what already exists is devalued, subjugated, or destroyed for the sake of what *might* exist. The modern cult of planners and "futurologists" has thus achieved a startling resemblance to Swift's "academy of projectors":[20]

> In these colleges, the professors contrive new rules and methods of agriculture and building, and new instruments and tools for all trades and manufactures; whereby, as they undertake, one man shall do the work of ten: a palace may be built in a week, of materials so durable, as to last for ever without repairing. All the fruits of the earth shall come to maturity, at whatever season we think fit to chuse, and encrease an hundred fold more than they do at present; with innumerable other happy proposals. The only inconvenience is, that none of these projects are yet brought to perfection; and, in the mean time, the whole country lies miserably waste . . .

People who are willing to follow technology wherever it leads are necessarily willing to follow it away from home, off the earth, and outside the sphere of human definition, meaning, and responsibility. One has to suppose that this would be all right if they did it only for themselves and if they accepted the terms of their technological romanticism absolutely—that is, if they would depart absolutely from all that they propose to supersede, never to return. But past a certain scale, as C. S. Lewis wrote,[21] the person who makes a technological choice does not choose for himself alone, but for others; past a certain scale, he chooses for *all* others. Past a certain scale, if the break with the past is great enough, he chooses for the past, and if the effects are lasting enough he chooses for the future. He makes, then, a choice that can neither be chosen against

[20] *Gulliver's Travels*, Everyman's Library, 1961, page 189.
[21] *The Abolition of Man*, Macmillan, 1975, pages 70–71.

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nor unchosen. Past a certain scale, there is no dissent from a technological choice.

People speaking out of this technological willingness cannot speak precisely, for what they are talking about does not yet exist. They cannot mean what they say because their words are avowedly speculative. They cannot stand by their words because they are talking about, if not *in*, the future, where they are not standing and cannot stand until long after they have spoken. All the grand and perfect dreams of the technologists are happening in the future, but nobody is there.

What can turn us from this deserted future, back into the sphere of our being, the great dance that joins us to our home, to each other and to other creatures, to the dead and the unborn? I think it is love. I am perforce aware how baldly and embarrassingly that word now lies on the page—for we have learned at once to overuse it, abuse it, and hold it in suspicion. But I do not mean any kind of abstract love (adolescent, romantic, or "religious"), which is probably a contradiction in terms, but particular love for particular things, places, creatures, and people, requiring stands and acts, showing its successes or failures in practical or tangible effects. And it implies a responsibility just as particular, not grim or merely dutiful, but rising out of generosity. I think that this sort of love defines the effective range of human intelligence, the range within which its works can be dependably beneficent. Only the action that is moved by love for the good at hand has the hope of being responsible and generous. Desire for the future produces words that cannot be stood by. But love makes language exact, because one loves only what one knows. One cannot love the future or anything in it, for nothing is known there. And one cannot unselfishly make a future for someone else. The love for the future is self-love—love for the present self, projected and magnified into the future, and it is an irremediable loneliness.

Because love is not abstract, it does not lead to trends or percentages or general behavior. It leads, on the contrary, to the perception that there is no such thing as general behavior. There is no abstract action. Love proposes the work of settled households and communities, whose innovations come about in response to immediate needs and immediate conditions, as opposed to the work of governments and corporations, whose innovations are produced out of the implicitly limitless desire for future power or profit. This

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difference is the unacknowledged cultural break in Mr. Fuller's evolutionary series: oxen, horse-drawn vehicles, horseless vehicles, ships of the sky. Between horse-drawn vehicles and horseless vehicles human life disconnected itself from local sources; energy started to flow away from home. A biological limit was overrun, and with it the deepest human propriety.

Or, to shift the terms, love defines the difference between the "global village" which is a technological and a totalitarian ideal, directly suited to the purposes of centralized governments and corporations, and the Taoist village-as-globe, where the people live frugally and at peace, pleased with the good qualities of necessary things, so satisfied where they are that they live and die without visiting the next village, though they can hear its dogs bark and its roosters crow.[22]

We might conjecture and argue a long time about the meaning and even the habitability of such a village. But one thing, I think, is certain: it would not be a linguistic no man's land in which words and things, words and deeds, words and people failed to stand in reliable connection or fidelity to one another. People and other creatures would be known by their names and histories, not by their numbers or percentages. History would be handed down in songs and stories, not reduced to evolutionary or technological trends. Generalizations would exist, of course, but they would be distilled from experience, not "projected" from statistics. They would sound, says Lao Tzu,[23] this way:

> "Alert as a winter-farer on an icy stream,"
> "Wary as a man in ambush,"
> "Considerate as a welcome guest,"
> "Selfless as melting ice,"
> "Green as an uncut tree,"
> "Open as a valley . . ."

I come, in conclusion, to the difference between "projecting" the future and making a promise. The "projecting" of the "futurologists" *uses* the future as the safest possible context for whatever is desired; it binds one only to selfish interest. But making a promise

[22] *Tao Te Ching*, LXXX.
[23] *Ibid.*, XV (Witter Bynner translation, Capricorn Books, 1962, page 33).

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binds one *to someone else's future.* If the promise is serious enough, one is brought to it by love, and in awe and fear. Fear, awe, and love bind us to no selfish aims, but to each other. And they enforce a speech more exact, more clarifying, and more binding than any speech that can be used to sell or advocate some "future." For when we promise in love and awe and fear there is a certain kind of mobility that we give up. We give up the romanticism of progress, that is always shifting its terms to fit its occasions. We are speaking where we stand, and we shall stand afterwards in the presence of what we have said.

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DAVID ROSENBERG

In Our Beds of Doubt or Certainty

—based on the original Hebrew Book of
Ecclesiastes, beginning at Chapter 7

They say it's better to keep your name clean
than your body whether bathing
in baby oil holy oil or covering a stink

with expensive deodorant
no man stinks more than a dead man
but, if left behind is the inner perfume

of a good name—then his deathday is happy
so no more false happy birthdays
until a man is dead

then he can be famous
without having to grease a palm or wear
the painted mask of success . . .

they say it's better to be with a family
burying their dead
than one celebrating successful occasions

for all will pass beyond
these forgotten fêtes
your vision will serve to remind them

you aren't eating your heart away
in feasts of gratitude or envy
but opening it

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to the face of loss
all must wear
and all will remember your presence

they say the face of grief
is better than the laughing
party masks of plastic

the raw skin of sadness
though bad for one's complexion
reddens the blood strengthens the heart

and improves the mind
a wise heart is anchored
in a natural seriousness at home

even at death with its wall of silence
even in a house that wails
in tune with hearts exposed and beating

while, running away from itself
a foolish heart capsizes
in a sea of nervous giggles

and flails desperately
behind a happy face of plastic
swimming back to its place at the party

under a paper moon
calmed by the stereo dutifully playing
"it's only a paper moon"

they say better listen to stinging
criticism from someone knowing
what they're talking about

than lending your ear to "friends"
you turn on like a radio
to the muzak of approval

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the best tunes become idiotic
when translated for the mouse-eared
masses inertia

is playing even more softly
under a muzak of desire
to be somewhere else

to escape into a soft sculpture
of the world created
and played on by heavies

having no idea what to do
with themselves an empty talent
bottling air milking respect

from wide-eyed calves looking
vainly for approval: the hot breath
in the nostrils of a bull

is what you get if not despair
served in silver trophy cups
empty as the occasions they honor

but even humility in the wisest person
allowing him to say
exactly what he sees

resisting influence and flattery
hardens into a statue of identity
to grace the social scene

"words to the wise" spoken at a cafe
like the coffee itself turns to oil
greasing the social mechanism

and he is also a helpless victim
of naive hearts and eyes
he impresses his image upon

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in his own naive sexuality
mistaking love for innocence
gratitude for understanding

they say it's better to listen
to what you think
you have to say inner ear

and eye open to what happens
to the event
in speaking in becoming a mirror a judge

everyone is hungry for images
of themselves better see through that
than start up new fantasies

keep your conscience a clear window
to see through
as your death approaches from a distance

better a happy deathday
unsurpassed
than happy birthdays increasingly desperate

let what's there be
to feel smell hear see
before you gulp down something

like a hungry dog or baby
better to see a thing come clear
in the emulsion of time

than lose your integrity
in the rush of pride
to impose an image on the movie

to expose a frame too quickly
outside the natural time
of creation

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don't get mad and impatient
restrain yourself
when everyone seems to be getting ahead

it's a stampede of mice
a rat race madness
quickening the mass of Disney hearts

don't look back in anger
at boats you think you missed
or whine about good old days

while you frown in the idiot's mirror
reading wrinkles as ancient ciphers of a dilemma
central to the origin of the big cartoon

in the past most people are living in
the vast expanding bubble of "progress"
that suddenly bursts

throwing water in the face
of the philosopher on the beach
dreaming of fountains of youth

what depths of disappointment spring
from fantastic wells of expectation
sunk in the false bottom of fantasyland

don't be so dumb as even to inquire
in the studied falsetto of a scholar
where has the past gone?

it will smack you in the face
for having turned your head
at every passing fancy

of knowledge shaped by the girdle of progress
then there are those who study it
accumulating knowledge as if it were money

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better to marry it
better yet inherit it
so there's time to sit in the shade

after gazing into the sun
its reflection off the metal
of coin

to sit in the cool shadow
of the mind's reflection safe
in the reality of sun

the difference is
(between accumulating and having)
the wise man has a life within

a harbor for his ship to come in
illuminated by an inner reality
feeling the sun's power as light

falling around a field or page
not to possess it from towers
but letting it be revealed

observe this working of God
light in its own time
as it reveals the touch of its creator

a tree bends to the sun
we can't straighten it
our mind can't overpower it

when a good day
comes your way
embrace it

and when the bad one arrives watch out
but patience observe the contrast
light creates a room for shadow

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one creator made each day
so we don't build up expectation
as a wall

but may see the stones fall
names and reputations
material ripped away to an open view

of the present around us
the dimension of depth
sweeping between light and shadow

between inside and outside
the dynamic of waves
sweeping away the tower

climbed by the one thinking he was master
of what he could survey: past and future
but it is drowned

along with elaborate constructions of myth
fortune-telling and other dark fortresses
built for a false security

each day is constructed anew
in the flow of time perfect as the sea
bearing a ship to its destiny

that is *felt* to be there
and in that feeling we can find no fault
with the nights and days that surprise us

in our beds of doubt or certainty
we are made perfectly awake
to the fathomless depth of creation.

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JULIA O'FAOLAIN

Daughters of Passion

THERE WAS A STORY ABOUT HER in the *Mail*. A phrase jumped off the page: ". . . the twisted logic of the terrorist mind . . ." Journalists! She'd have spat if she'd had the spittle; but her mouth was dry. "Violence," someone had said, "is the only way to gain a hearing for moderation." That was reckoning without the press.

The argument broke open, porous as cheese. *Cheese* . . . She could smell the reek of it, pinching her nostrils.

Thoughts escaped her. This was the twelfth day of her hunger strike and energy was running low. Half a century ago, in Brixton Gaol, the Lord Mayor of Cork had died after a seventy-four-day fast. A record? Maybe. But how *much* of him could have survived those seventy-four days to die? A sane mind? The ability to choose? Surely not? Surely all that was left in the end would have been something like the twitch in a chicken-carcass, a set of reflexes primed like an abandoned robot's? Her own mind was bent on sabotaging her will. "Eat," her organism signalled slyly to itself in divers ways. It slurped and burped the message, registered it by itch, wind-pain, cold, hunger, sophistries. Sum ergo think. But thinking used up energy. Better just to dream: let images flicker the way they used to do years and years ago on the school-cinema screen. Then too it had been a case of energy running low. The generator went on the blink every time films were shown in the barn and that was often, for the hall was constantly being remodelled. The nuns were great builders.

"Come," they coerced visitors, "come see our improvements."

Change thrilled them. The stone might have been part of themselves: a collective shell. Meanwhile, on film nights, rain drummed out the sound track and a draughty screen distorted the smile of Jennifer Jones playing Bernadette. The barn was cold but discomfort was welcomed in the convent. Waiting for the centrally-heated hall put in time while waiting for heaven.

She missed the community feeling.

Her vision shifted. Bricks and mortar from the nuns' hall had

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turned to butcher's meat. She was choking. Her throat had dried, its sides seeming to clap together. She pictured it like an old boot, drying until the tongue inside it shrivelled. It itched. Food could drive any other consideration from her mind. Images decomposed and went edible, like those trick paintings in which whole landscapes turn out to be made up of fruit or sausages. She could smell sausages. Fat beaded on them. Charred skins burst and the stuffing pushed through slit bangers in a London pub. Three sausages and three half lagers, please. Harp or Heineken. Yes, draught. Could we have the sausages nice and crispy. Make that six. A dab of mustard. Jesus! Eat this in remembrance. Oh, and three rolls of French bread. Thanks. Christ-the-pelican slits his breast to feed the faithful. Dry stuff the communion wafer but question not the gift host in my mouth. Mustn't laugh. Hurts. Where's the water mug? Tea in this one. They'd left it on purpose. The screws were surely hoping she'd eat in a moment of inattention. It hadn't happened though. Relax. Water. What a relief. Made one pee and the effort of getting up was painful but if she didn't drink her throat grew sandpapery. You wanted to vomit and there was nothing to vomit. A body could bring up its guts—could it?

Sitting up made her dizzy. She felt a pain around her heart. Lie back. Her mind though was clear as well water. At least she was too weak to get across the cell to that tray without catching herself. They'd left it there with the food she'd refused this morning or maybe yesterday. Not that she felt fussy. Easier now though that her body was subdued beyond tricking her.

Conviction hardened. It had come with habit. Maggy was here through chance.

"I'm sure I don't know," the head screw had said, "where you think this is going to get you. It's up to you, of course, to make your own decision."

Cool, bored. Managing to convey her sense of all this as childish theatrics and a waste of everyone's time. She knew the system and the system didn't change just because some little Irish terrorist wouldn't eat her dinner. She was fair though, abiding by the Home Secretary's guidelines. Nobody had kicked Maggy or put a bag over her head. This screw looked as though such things were outside her experience which perhaps they were. One lot of prison employees might be unaware of what the other lot were doing. A clever division of labour: those needing clear consciences for televi-

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sion interviews and the like could *have* clear consciences. The best myths had a dose of truth to them.

It might have been easier if they *had* knocked her about: given her more reason to resist.

Dizzy had said, "The trouble with you, Maggy, is that you're an adapter. I suppose orphans are. They're survivors and survivors adapt."

She meant that Maggy listened to the other side: a woeful error since it weakened resolve. Look at her now ready to believe in the decency of that screw. "Sneering Brit," Dizzy would decide right off. She never called the English anything but "Brits."

"Ah come on, Maggy. *Be* Irish for Pete's sake. What did the Brits ever do for you or yours? Listen, it's a class war. Don't you see?"

Dizzy was of Anglo-Irish Protestant stock and had gone native in a programmed way. Her vocabulary was revolutionary. Her upperclass voice had learned modulation at the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art. This made her enterprises sound feasible, as though they had already been realized, then turned back into fiction for celebrating in, say, the Hampstead Theater Club or one of those fringe places on the Euston Road.

Rosheen's style was more demotic. She sang in pubs and in the shower of the flat which Maggy had shared with her and Dizzy.

"*Another marthyr for auld Oireland / Another murther for the Crown . . .* "

More exasperating than sheer noise was the spasm in Rosheen's voice. Maggy suspected she got more pleasure from these laments than she did from sex. The two had got connected in Rosheen's life. She had married an unemployed Derryman who took out his frustrations by beating her until Dizzy coerced her into walking out on him. Missing him, Rosheen flowed warm water down her soapy body every morning and belted out verses about tombs, gallowses and losses which would never be forgotten. Defeats, in her ballads, were greater than victory; girls walked endlessly on the sunny side of mountains with sad but pretty names and reflected on the uselessness of the return of spring. Maggy despised herself for the rage Rosheen aroused in her.

"Well, it's all due to history, isn't it?"

The three had watched the Northern Ireland Secretary on the box some weeks before Maggy's arrest. Talking of how a political solution would make the IRA irrelevant—*great* acumen, God bless

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him!—he had the mild smile of one obliged to shoulder responsibility and take the brickbats.

He got Rosheen's goat. "He gets my goat," she said. Maggy winced.

"He gets on my tits," said Dizzy to show solidarity. But the effect was different since Dizzy could talk any way she felt inclined whereas poor Rosheen was stuck in one register.

Maggy, who had known Rosheen since they were six, had for her the irritable affection one has for relatives. Also envy. They had made their first communion side by side dressed in veils and identical bridal gowns and Rosheen had made the better communion. Maggy, watching through falsely closed lids, had been stunned to see ecstasy on Rosheen's rather puddingy face. She had been hoping for ecstasy herself and it was only when she saw it come to Rosheen that she gave up and admitted to herself that Jesus had rejected her. It was a close equivalent to being jilted at the altar and in some ways she had never got over it.

"Your First Holy Communion," Mother Theresa had promised, "will be the most thrilling event in your whole lives."

"Really?"

"Oh," the nun conceded, "there will, I suppose, be other excitements." It was clear that she could not conceive of them. She had been teaching communion classes for forty years. Photographs of groups dressed in white veils lined her classroom walls. "Strength will flow into you," she promised. "I don't mean," she smiled at Rosheen who had made this mistake earlier, "the sort of strength Batman has."

The others gave Rosheen a charitable look. They were practising charity and she was its best recipient. Charity was for those to whom you could not bring yourself to accord esteem or friendship and in those days it had been hard to produce these for Rosheen, whose eyes were pink and from whose nostrils snot worms were always apt to crawl. You had to look away so as to give her a chance to sniff them back up. Even then you could sometimes see her, with the corner of your eye, using the back of her hand.

And then Rosheen had made the best communion.

It was not utterly unaccountable. The nuns had mentioned that the last shall be first. Their behaviour, however, made this seem unlikely. They preferred girls who knew how to use handkerchiefs, scored for the team and generally did them credit.

Maggy recalled quite clearly how, having finally got the wafer

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down her throat—to bite would have been sacrilegious, so this was slow—and still feeling no ecstasy, she had opened her eyes. All heads were bowed. The priest was wiping the chalice. Could he have made some mistake, she wondered, left out some vital bit of the ceremony so that the miracle had failed to happen? Maybe he would realize and make an announcement: "Dearly beloved, it is my duty to inform you that transubstantiation has failed to take place. Due to an error, you have all received mere bread and may regard the ceremony up to now as a trial run. Please return to the altar . . . " These words became so real to Maggy that she nudged Rosheen who was kneeling beside her. "Get up," she whispered bossily. "We're to go back . . . " She was arrested by Rosheen's face. It was alight. Colour from a stained glass window had been carried to it by a sunbeam and blazed madly from her eyes, her nostrils and the lolling tip of her tongue. Rosheen smiled, rotated and then bowed her head. She looked like a drunk or a painted saint: ecstatic then? Could she be pretending? Maggy considered giving her a pinch but instead bowed her own head and concentrated on managing not to cry.

She was crying now. Hunger made you weepy. She'd been warned. It made you cold too, although she was wearing several jersies and two pairs of leotards.

Rosheen had never been so right again. Probably she should never have left the convent. Someone had told Maggy that she had wanted to enter but the nuns wouldn't have her. Then she'd married Sean. That marriage had certainly not been made in heaven: it was a case of the lame leading the halt.

"A pair of babes in the wood," was the opinion of Sean's mother, Mairéad.

Mairéad had come to London some months ago to see Sean and dropped round to Dizzy's flat. Maggy had been the only one in.

"Tell Rosheen I don't hold it against her that she left him." Mairéad was a chain-smoking flagpole of a woman, stuck about with polyester garments so crackling new that they must surely have been bought for this trip. "Half the trouble in the world," she drew on her cigarette then funnelled smoke from her nostrils with an energy which invited harnessing, "comes," she said, "from people asking too much of themselves." She coughed. "And of each other. Not that it's Sean's fault either. I'm not saying that. It's his nerves," she told Maggy. "They're shot to bits. What would you expect? When that wee boy was growing up he seen things happen

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to his family that shouldn't happen to an animal." She let Maggy make tea and, drinking it, talked in a practised way about misfortune. "She's at work then, is she? Well give her my best. I'm half glad I missed her. I only wanted her to know there were no hard feelings. Will you tell her that from me? No hard feelings," she enunciated carefully as though used to dealing with drunks or children or maybe men with shot nerves. "I'd have no right to ask her to nurse a man in Sean's condition. I know that. He's not normal any more than the rest of us." She had a high laugh which escaped like a hiccup: "Heheh! He was never strong. A seven-month baby. I never had the right food. Then the year he was sixteen it was nothing but them bustin in and calling us fucking Fenian gets and threatening to blow our heads off. Every night nearly. That was the summer of 1971. They wrecked the house; stole things; ripped up the carpet. Four times they raided us before Sean left to come here. He's highly strung and his nerves couldn't stand it. He still has nightmares. Ulcers. Rosheen could tell you. Sure it has to come out some way. He gets violent. I know it." Mairéad stubbed out a cigarette and drained her tea. "Have you another drop? Thanks. I'll drink this up. Then I'd better be going. I've been going on too much. It could be worse. You don't have to tell me. Wasn't my sister's boy shot! Killed outright. He was barely fourteen and the army said they thought he was a sniper. I ask you how could anyone take a fourteen-year-old for a sniper? You're from the south? I suppose all this is strange to you? I'm supposed to be here to get away from it all. You look forward to doing that and then the funny thing is you can't. It's as well I missed Rosheen. No point upsetting her, is there? You'll remember what I said to say, won't you? Thanks for the tea."

Maggy saw her out and watched her walk away, turning, as she put distance between them, into a typical Irish charwoman such as you saw walking in their domesticated multitudes around the streets of Camden.

Dizzy, who got home before Rosheen, said: "Don't mention the visit to her."

"Mightn't she be glad to get the message?"

"Really, Maggy!" Dizzy sounded like a head girl—had *been* head girl when they were at school together, in spite or perhaps because of being the only Protestant. "You have no sense of people," she scolded. "Rosheen has no sense at all."

Maggy began to laugh at this arrogance and Dizzy—which was the nice thing about her—joined in. "Seriously though," she drove

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home her point. "Rosheen could easily go back to that ghastly Sean. Just *because* he's so ghastly. She has to be protected from herself! From that Irish death wish. Surely you can see that she's better off with me."

"With us?"

"With me. Don't be obtuse."

Dizzy had been bossing Maggy and Rosheen since the day they'd met her. They'd all been about twelve at the time. Maggy knew this because she remembered that she and Rosheen had been on their way back to the convent after winning medals for under thirteens at a Feis Ceol. Maggy's was for verse-speaking and Rosheen's for Irish dance. Suddenly Rosheen let out a screech.

"I've lost me medal. What'll I do? The nuns'll be raging. They all prayed for me to win it and now I haven't got it to show."

"It's winning that matters," Maggy tried to soothe her. "The medal isn't valuable. Come on. We'll miss our bus."

"I'm not moving from this spot till I make sure I've lost it."

Rosheen began to frisk herself. They were standing on a traffic island in the middle of O'Connell Street and it wasn't long before her manoeuvres began to attract attention. When she unbuttoned her vest to grope inside it, a tripper with an English accent shouted:

"Starting early, aren't you? What are you doing, love? Giving us a bit of a striptease?"

Maggy spat at him. It was an odd, barbaric gesture but, remembering, she could again feel the fury of the convent girl at the man's violation of dignity and knew her rage could not have been vented with less. Give her a knife and she'd have stuck it in him. The man must have seen insanity in her face for he wiped the spittle from his lapel and moved silently away. Rosheen, typically, had failed to notice the incident.

"I've lost it," she decided, buttoning her blouse. "I'm going to pray to Saint Anthony to get it back for me." She knelt on the muddy pavement of the traffic island. "Kneel down and pray with me," she invited Maggy.

"Here?" Maggy's voice shot upwards. "You shouldn't be let out, Rosheen O'Dowd! You should be tied up. People are *looking* at you!" Being looked at was agony to Maggy at that time. "Rosheen," she begged. "Get up. You're destroying your gym-slip. Please, Rosheen. I bet," she invented desperately, "it's against the law. We're obstructing traffic. *Rosheen*!"

But all Rosheen had to say was: "You're full of human respect.

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Shame on you." And she began blessing herself with gestures designed for distant visibility. Like a swimmer signalling a lifeguard, she was trying for Saint Anthony's attention. He was known to be a popular and busy saint.

"I'm off." Maggy, unable to bear another second of this, stepped off the traffic island in front of the advancing wheels of a double-decker bus which stopped with a shriek of brakes.

"Are you trying to make a murderer out of me?" The driver jumped out to shake her by the shoulders. "That's an offence," he yelled. "I could have you summonsed. In court. What's your name and address."

"Magdalen Mary Cashin, Convent of the Daughters of Passion."

"What's that? A nursery rhyme?" The man was angry. Passengers were hanging out of the bus, staring. "Tell me your real name," the man roared, "or . . . "

Maggy ducked from his grasp, ran and, miraculously missing the rest of the traffic, made it to the opposite footpath.

"What's chasing you?" A girl of about her own age was staring inquisitively at her. "You're from the Passion Convent, aren't you? I know the uniform. I may be coming next term."

"You?" Maggy was alert for mockery. "You're a Protestant."

"Not really. My parents are, vaguely, I suppose—but how did you know?"

Maggy shrugged. "It's obvious."

"How? I'd better find out, hadn't I?" the girl argued. "If I'm coming to your school?"

"You wouldn't be let come like that."

"Like what?"

"Look at your skirt." Maggie spoke reluctantly. She was still unsure that she was not being laughed at. "And you've no stockings on! Then there's your hair. . . . " She gave up. The girl was hardly a girl at all. Protestants almost seemed to belong to another sex. Their skirts were as short as Highlanders' kilts and their legs marbled and blue from exposure. "Don't you feel the cold?" she asked. Maybe Protestants didn't.

"No. I'm hardy. Do you wear vests and things? I despise vests and woolly knickers!"

The intimacy of this was offensive but Maggy's indignation had been so used up in the last ten minutes that her responses were unguarded.

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"I do too but I'm made to wear them," she said and felt suddenly bound to the person to whom she had made such a private admission.

"My name's Dizzy," said Dizzy. "Is that your friend over there? I think she's signalling."

"She's odd." Maggy disassociated herself from the embarrassing Rosheen, who was indeed waving and rising and replunging to her knees. "Don't mind her," she begged. "It's best to pay her no attention."

"She's praying, isn't she? That's marvellous."

"What?"

"She doesn't give a damn. Catholicism interests me," Dizzy confided. "I think Catholics are more Irish, don't you?"

"More Irish than whom?"

"Us."

"You?"

"We *are* Irish, you know," Dizzy argued. "My family has been here since the time of Elizabeth the First. They're mentioned in heaps of chronicles."

That, to Maggy's mind, only showed how foreign they were. The chronicles would have been written by the invaders. But she didn't mention this. What interested her about Dizzy was not her likeness to herself but her difference. It was clear that she lacked the layers of doubt and caution which swaddled Maggy's brain as thickly as the unmentionable vests and bloomers did her body.

"I found it!" Rosheen had arrived, all pant and spittle. She waved the medal excitedly. "Saint Anthony answered my prayer. I knew he would. Isn't he great?" Rosheen always spoke of saints as though they were as close to her as her dormitory mates. "Do you know where I found it? You'll never believe me: in my shoe."

"This is Rosheen O'Dowd," said Maggy formally. "I'm Margaret Mary Cashin and you're . . . ?" She was chary of the ridiculous name.

"Dizzy," said Dizzy. "Desdemona FitzDesmond actually, but it's a mouthful, isn't it? So, Dizzy."

"We're orphans," Maggy thought to say.

"What luck," said Dizzy. "Wait till you meet my sow of a mother. She leads poor Daddy a dreadful dance. Drink, lovers, debts," she boasted. "Family life isn't all roses, I can tell you."

The orphans were interested and impressed.

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"Here's your tea." The screw had brought a fresh tray. "You'd be well advised to have it. As well start as you plan to finish and, believe me, they all eat in the end! Chips this evening," she said.

Maggy smelled and imagined the pith of their insides and the crisply gilded shells. An ideal potato chip, big as a blimp, filled her mind's sky. The door closed; a rattle of keys receded down the corridor. Heels thumped. Teeth in other cells would be sinking through crisp-soft chips. Tongues would be propelling the chewed stuff down throats. If the din of metal were to let up she would surely hear soft munching. Her own saliva tasted salty. Or was it sweat? Did they count the chips put in her tray? Wouldn't put it past them. Tell us is she weakening. Keep count. They'd never. Wouldn't they just? Besides, to eat even one would surely make her feel worse.

There was no political status in England. No political prisoners at all. So why insist on treatment you couldn't get? They had made this point laboriously to her, then given up trying to talk sense to someone who wouldn't listen. People had died recently from forced feeding so they were chary of starting that. They followed the Home Secretary's Guidelines and what happened next was no skin off their noses. The country had enough troubles without worrying about the bloody Irish. Always whining and drinking, or else refusing to eat and blaming the poor old U.K. for all their woes. They had their own country now but did that stop them? Not on your nelly, it didn't. They were still over here in their droves taking work when a lot of English people couldn't find it. Rowdy, noisy. Oh forget it. When you saw all the black and brown faces, you almost came to like the Paddies if only they'd stop making a nuisance of themselves.

A man had come to see her, a small man with a glass eye whom she'd seen twice in Dizzy's flat. He was from the IRA. He winked his real eye while the glass one stared at her. He had claimed to be a relative, managing somehow to get visiting privileges. She must play along with his story, winked the eye. Was she demanding political status? Good.

"They'll deny it but we have to keep asking. It's the principle of the thing."

There had been a confusion about him as though he didn't know whom to distrust most: her, himself, or the screws. His dead eye kept vigil and it occurred to her that one half of his face mistrusted the other.

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Impossible to get comfortable. Her body felt as if enclosed in an orthopoedic cast. She had a sense of plaster oozing up her nose and felt tears on her cheeks but didn't know why she was crying, unless from frustration at the way she had boxed herself in like a beetle in a matchbox. She was boxed in by her ballady story. It didn't fit her, was inaccurate but couldn't be adjusted, making its point with the simple speed of a traffic light or the informative symbol on a lavatory door. She was in a prison within a prison: the cast. Slogans were scrawled on it: graffitti. She was a public convenience promenading promises to blow, suck, bomb the Brits, logos, addresses of abortion clinics, racial taunts. "Wipe out all Paddies and nignogs now!" shrieked one slogan cut deep into her plaster cast inside which she wasn't sure she was. Maybe she'd wiped herself out?

She had committed a murder. Performed an execution. Saved a man's life.

Depending on how you looked at it. Who had? Maggy the merciful murderess.

Her story was this: she had been an orphan, her mother probably a whore. Brought up by nuns, she had lost her faith, found another, fought for it and been imprisoned. This was inexact but serviceable. If they made a ballad about it, Rosheen could sing it in a Camden pub.

When she was very small the nuns told Maggy that she had forty mothers: their forty selves. An aunt visiting from Liverpool, was indignant.

"Frustrated old biddies!" These, she asserted, were mock mothers. "You have your own," she said. "What are they trying to do? Kill her off? What do they know of the world?" she asked. "Cheek."

"What world?" Maggy wondered. She was maybe four.

"Now don't *you* be cheeky," said the aunt.

On what must have been a later visit the aunt reported the mother to be dead. Maggy remembered eating an egg which must have been provided for consolation.

"I'll bet they'll say it's for the best," raged the aunt and began painting her face in a small portable mirror. "You didn't love her at all, did you?" she interrogated, moistening her eyelash brush with spit. "I told her not to send you here. She'd have kept you by her if she could. Children," the aunt said, "have no hearts."

The aunt too must have died for she didn't come back—and indeed maybe "aunt" and "mother" were one and the same? Maggy,

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when she grew older, guessed herself to be illegitimate, as there had never been any mention of a father. And so it proved when eventually she came to London and applied for a birth certificate to Somerset House.

"You don't know your luck. No beastly heritage to shuck off!"

Dizzy had come to the nuns' school to spite her mother who favoured agnosticism, raw fruit, fresh air and idleness for girls.

"Not that it matters where she goes to school!" The mother was mollified by the smallness of the nuns' fee. "Nobody of my blood ever worked," she said. "Dizzy will marry young." She spoke without force for she was to die of diabetes when Dizzy was fourteen. After that Dizzy's father became very vague and did not protest when she became a Catholic. Thus fortified, she was allowed by the nuns to invite Maggy home for weekends.

They spent these talking about what they took to be sex and dressing up in colonial gear which they found in the attic. Much of it was mildewed and so stiff that it seemed it must have been hewn rather than tailored. There were pith helmets and old-fashioned jodhpurs shaped like hearts. Dizzy's father had served in Africa, although she herself had been born after his return to Ireland when her mother was forty-four.

"I'm a child of the Change," she relished the phrase. "I'm not like them."

Who she wanted to be like was the bulk of the local population and on Poppy Day she hauled down the Union Jack which her father had raised. He was apologetic but this only annoyed her the more for she felt that he ought to have known his own mind. Dizzy was eager for order and when she became a Catholic fussed unfashionably about hats in church and fish on Fridays.

On leaving school, Maggy won a scholarship to an American university. Coming back, after eight years there, she met Dizzy again in London. This was a Dizzy who seemed to have lost much of her nerve for she blushed when Maggy asked:

"Did you know I was in love with you when we were in our teens?"

This was a requiem for someone no longer discernable in Dizzy, whom Maggy recalled as pale and volatile as the fizz on soda water. Dizzy had had fly-away hair worn in a halo as delicate as a dandelion clock. Her skin might have been blanched in the dusk of her secretive house. Agile and seeming boyish to Maggy who knew no boys, she swung up trees like a monkey so that one could see all

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the way up her skirt. She was Maggy's anti-self. Once, in a spirit of scientific inquiry, they showed each other their private parts. Later, Dizzy discovered this to be a sin or at least the occasion of one.

"You knew," she accused. "You should have told me."

Maggy was disappointed to find freedom so fragile and each felt let down.

Now Dizzy's skin was opaque, thickish. She had lost her charm, but Maggy, although she might not have liked her if they'd just met for the first time, was responsive to memory. She felt linked by a bond she could not gauge to this woman who had first alerted her to the possibility of frankness. Dizzy had provided a model of mannish virtue at a time when Maggy knew no men and now Maggy, who had lost and left a man in America, found herself eager for support. Dizzy could still act with vigour. Look at the way she had rescued Rosheen.

The two—Maggy had heard the story from each separately—had not met for years when one night, a little over a year ago, they sat opposite each other on the North London underground. Rosheen's eyes were red; she had just run out of the house after being kicked in the stomach by Sean. For want of anywhere to go, she was heading for a late-night cinema.

"Leave him," said Dizzy, "you can stay in my flat."

"I love him," Rosheen told her. "He needs me. He can't cope by himself. Poor Sean! He's gentle most of the time and when he's not, it's not his fault. He's sick, you see. His mother warned me: Mairéad. It's his nerves. Ulcers. Anyway we're married."

"All the more reason," Dizzy told her, "to get out while you can. Are you going to have kids with a chap like that? You should call the police," she lectured.

"I couldn't." Rosheen was an underdog to the marrow.

"I could." Dizzy had Anglo-Irish assurance. "Just let him come looking for you." She herded Rosheen home to her flat and the husband, when he presented himself, was duly given the bum's rush. He took to ambushing Rosheen, who went back to him twice but had to slink back to Dizzy after some days with black eyes and other more secret ailments.

"You're like a cat that goes out on the tiles," Dizzy told her. "You need an interest. You should come to political rallies with me."

When Maggy arrived in London and agreed to move in with the

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two, Rosheen was working as an usherette in a theater where Dizzy was stage manager. The plays put on by the group were revolutionary and much of Dizzy's conversation echoed their scripts.

"You have a slave mind," she said without malice to Maggy, who claimed she was too busy finishing a thesis to have time for politics. Dizzy did not ask the subject of the thesis—it was semiology—nor show any interest in the years Maggy had spent in America. Having gathered that there had been some sort of man trouble, she preferred to know no more. To Rosheen, who showed more curiosity, Maggy remarked that her situation was much like Rosheen's own.

"Convalescing?"

"Yes."

"This is a good place to do it," said Rosheen. "Though I sometimes think I won't be able to stand it. Sean keeps ringing me up. Crying. And I'm in dread that I'll break down and go back to him. I miss him at night something awful."

"So why . . . "

"Ah sure it'd never be any good."

"Is that what Dizzy tells you?"

"Yes. But sure I know myself that when a relationship has gone bad there's no mending it."

"Relationship" would be Dizzy's word. But Maggy wasn't going to interfere. Rosheen she remembered from their childhood as unmodulated and unskinned: an emotional bomb liable to go off unpredictably. Better let Dizzy handle her. She herself was trying to finish her thesis before her money ran out. She spent her days at the British Museum, coming home as late as nine p.m. Often a gust of talk would roar into the hallway as she pushed open the door. "Bourgeois crapology," she'd hear, or: "It's bloody *not* within the competence of the minister. Listen I know the 1937 constitution by heart. D'ya want to bet?" The voices would be Irish, fierce and drunk. Maggy would slip into the kitchen, get herself food as noiselessly as she could manage and withdraw into her room. Towards the evening's end, Rosheen's voice invariably reached her, singing some wailing song and Maggy would have wagered any money that the grief throbbing through it had not a thing to do with politics.

Sometimes, the phone in the hall would ring and Rosheen would have it off the hook before the third peal. It was outside Maggy's bedroom door and she could hear Rosheen whisper to it,

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her furtive voice muffled by the coats which hung next to it and under which she seemed to plunge her head to hide perhaps from Dizzy.

"You're drunk," she'd start. "You are. Sean, you're not to ring here, I told you. I suppose they've just shut the pub . . . it's not that, no . . . even if you were cold stone sober I'd say the same . . . Listen, why don't you go to bed and sleep it off? Have you eaten anything? What about your ulcer? Listen, go and get a glass of milk somewhere . . . you can . . . I can't . . . it's not that. I do. I do know my own mind but . . . She's not a dyke, Sean . . . You know as well as I do it'd never work . . . If only you'd take the cure . . . Well it's a vicious circle then, isn't it? . . . Please, Sean, ah don't be that way, Sean . . . I do but . . . ah Sean . . . "

Sooner or later there would be the click of the phone. Rosheen would stand for a while among the coats, then open the door to go into the front room. Later, she would be singing again, this time something subdued like one of the hymns which they had sung together in school. This tended to put a damper on the party and the guests would clatter out shortly afterwards.

Next day smells of stale beer and ash pervaded the flat, and Rosheen's voice, raised in the shower, pierced through the slap of water to reach a half-sleeping Maggy.

Mo-o-other of Christ, / Sta-a-ar of the sea, / Pra-a-ay for the wanderer. / Pray for me.

"You missed a good evening," Dizzy reproached. "I don't know why you can't be sociable. Mix. There were interesting, committed people there. One was a fellow who escaped from Long Kesh."

"I have reading to do."

"Piffle! Do you good to get away from your books. Live. Open yourself to new experiences."

The man Maggy had lived with in San Francisco had made similar reproaches. Books, he said, made Maggy egocentric. Squirrelling away ideas, she was trying to cream the world's mind. His was a sentient generation, he told her, but she reminded him of the joke about the guy caught committing necrophilia whose defence was that he'd taken the corpse to be a live Englishwoman.

"Irish."

Irish, English—what was the difference? It was her coldness which had challenged him. He was a man who relished difficulty. Beneath her cold crust he'd counted on finding lava and instead what he'd found inside was colder still: like eating baked Alaska.

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Maggy, feeling that she was in violation of some emotional equivalent of the Fair Trade Descriptions Act, blamed everything on her First Communion. She'd been rejected by her maker, she explained, thrown on the reject heap and inhibited since. This mollified her lover and they took an affectionate leave of each other. Now, in wintry London, where men like him were as rare as humming birds, she groaned with afterclaps of lust.

Well, if her thaw was untimely, the fault was her own.

What was really too bad was that Rosheen, who had passed the First-Communion test with flying colours, should be unable to consummate her punctual passions. She was slurping out feeling now, steaming and singing in the shower while the other two ate breakfast.

"*Mother of Chri-i-ist . . .* "

"How was your First Communion?" Maggy asked Dizzy. "Did you experience ecstasy?"

"I don't think anyone mentioned the word. I thought of it more as a way of joining the club. As a convert, you know."

"*Sta-a-a-r of the . . .* Fuck!" Rosheen had dropped the shampoo. Now they would all get glass splinters in their feet.

"Didn't you notice the prayers?" Maggy wondered. *"May thy wounds be to me food and drink by which I may be nourished, inebriated and overjoyed!* Surely you remember that? And: *Thou alone will ever be my hope, my riches, my delight, my pleasure, my joy . . . My fragrance, my sweet savour?* It goes on."

"Do you think bloody Rosheen's cut herself? It's a responsibility having her around. I didn't think you were pious, Maggy. More toast?"

"I saw it all," said Maggy, "as a promise of what I'd find outside the convent: men like Christs who'd provide all that."

"I do think semiology is the wrong thing for you, Maggy. You should put your energies into something practical."

"Dizzy, you're a treat! You've been trying to de-Anglicize yourself since the day we met, but your officer-class genes are too much for you."

This was going too far. Dizzy, hurt, had to be sweetened by a gift of liqueur jam for which Maggy had to go all the way to Harrods. The trip made her late and when she got back to the flat Dizzy had left for the local pub. Maggy, joining her there, found her chatting to a man who sometimes dropped in after work. He

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was a sandy-haired chap who probably worked in an insurance office. Dizzy imagined him as starved for life and in search of anecdotes. "I drop into an Irish pub in Camden," he would tell his wife who would be wearing an apron covered with Campari ads. Dizzy, nourishing this imagined saga, had tried to get Rosheen to sing while he was in the pub, though it was always too early and the ambience wasn't right. "It *is* an IRA pub, you know," she had told him, slipping in and out of Irishness as though it were stage make-up.

"I believe less and less in democracy," she was saying when Maggy arrived. "Hullo, Maggy. What're you having? Don't you agree that democracy is a con? Do you know who said 'the people have no right to do wrong'? Also 'there are rights which a minority may justly uphold in arms against a majority'? Bet you don't."

The man in the belted mac and sandy hair had nothing to say to this. Dizzy, however, could carry on two ends of a conversation.

"You might say," she supplied, "that the people have a right to decide for themselves. But 'the people' are people like that gutless wonder, Sean. *They* never initiate change, so . . . "

Maggy left for the loo. Through its window she saw Sean and Rosheen embracing in the damp and empty garden of the pub. Both seemed to be crying. It might, however, be rain on their cheeks. She went back to the lounge.

"Saw it in Malaya," the macintoshed man was saying. "Bulk of the people were loyal. Just a few agitators. You've got to string 'em up right at the start. Cut off the gangrened limb. Else you'll have chaos."

"But I," said Dizzy, "was speaking *on behalf* of the agitators, the leaven, the heroes!"

"Oh," the man moved his glass away from hers. "I could hardly go along with that."

Rosheen stood at the door of the lounge and beckoned Maggy behind Dizzy's back. She put a finger on her lips.

"I'm going." Maggy got up.

Rosheen rushed Maggy down a corridor. "Let's get out of here. That man's in the Special Branch. A detective. He's looking for Sean."

"Why . . . but then Dizzy?"

"Dizzy's an eejit, doesn't know whether she's coming or going."

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"You think Dizzy's an eejit?" Maggy couldn't have been more astonished if a worm had stood erect on its tail and spoken.

"You know she is, Maggy! She's in way over her head. Wait till I tell you." Rosheen's eyes were red, but she spoke lucidly. "It's Sean they're after. They want him to turn informer and if he doesn't, they'll spread the word that he *has*. Then the IRA will get him. And you know what *they* do to informers."

"Are you sure?" Maggy asked, but it was likely enough. She remembered Mairéad's description of the nerve-shot Sean. He was the very stuff of which the police could hope to make an informer. His family had a record. Had he one himself? "Is he political?" she asked.

"No, but they could nail him. They can nail anyone."

"But what does he *know*? I mean what information has he?"

"That's the trouble," Rosheen told her. "He doesn't know much at all. But in self-defence he'll have to shop someone and the only one he can think of is Dizzy."

"Dizzy?"

"You see she's not real IRA: only on the fringe, expendable. Sean thinks they mightn't mind about her. The IRA, I mean. And naturally *he* hates her." Rosheen blushed and added quickly, "This is killing him. He's passing blood again. Both sides have their eye on him now. He's been seen talking to that detective, so if anything at all happens in the next few weeks, it'll be blemt on Sean. I think he's a dead man." Rosheen spoke numbly. "If one lot doesn't get him, the others will."

"And what *is* Dizzy up to? I mean what could he tell them?"

Rosheen turned stunned eyes on Maggy, who saw that there was no turning *her* into an Emerald Pimpernel. Dizzy, having stumbled onto territory which Rosheen knew better, might be revealed as an eejit and a play-actress but Rosheen herself, helpless as a heifer who has somehow strayed onto the center divider of a highway, could only wait and wonder whether the traffic of events might be miraculously diverted before it mowed her down. "What do they get expendable people like her to do?" she asked. "Plant bombs."

Dizzy, when faced with the question, reacted violently: "Maggy, are you working for the Special Branch? Shit, I should have known! All that pretence at being apathetic—or," her eyes nar-

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rowed, "is it Rosheen who's been talking? I always thought Sean had the stuff of a stool pigeon." She went on like this until Maggy cut her short with the news that who *was* in the Special Branch was Dizzy's drinking companion whose phone number Maggy—thanks to Rosheen—was in a position to let her have.

"It's a Scotland-Yard number. Check if you like," she said, astounded at the way Dizzy's authority had crumbled. It was like the emperor's clothes: an illusion, nothing but RADA vowels, that officer-class demeanour, thought Maggy, who now felt powerful and practical herself. Rosheen, like one of those creatures in folk tales who hand the heroine some magic tool, had made Maggy potent.

In return, the helper must herself be helped. Maggy remembered Rosheen's telephone colloquies with Sean seeping, regularly as bed-time stories, under her own bedroom door and that Rosheen's renunciatory voice had quavered like a captive bird's as she hid among the heavy coats in Dizzy's front hall. Now she must be allowed to unleash her precarious passion in peace.

"*You're* a security risk, you must see that," said Maggy to Dizzy, making short work of her protests. "So you'd better let me pick up your bomb. Never mind why I want to. That's my concern. Motives," she told her, "are irrelevant to history. If I do this for the IRA, I shall be IRA. Wasn't that your own calculation?"

This bit of rhetoric proved truer than foreseen, for a number of squat, tough-faced, under-nourished-looking people turned up at her trial and had to be cleared from the public gallery where they created a disturbance and gave clenched-fist salutes. They seemed to have co-opted her act, and her lawyer brought along copies of excitable weekly papers which described it in terms she could not follow because their references were rancorous and obscure. One was called *An Phoblacht,* another *The Starry Plough* and there was a sad daily from Belfast full of ads for money-lenders, in memoriam columns and, for her, a bleak fraternity. Dizzy did not come and neither did Rosheen.

Who did attend the trial and visit her afterwards was the glass-eyed man. "All Ireland is with you," he said, "all true Irish Socialist Republicans." Was this a joke? Did the eye gleam with irony? Or had he meant that her act was public property, whether she liked this or not, and despite the fact that her victim had not been Dizzy's target at all? *That* was to have been a building and there was to have been a telephone warning to avoid loss of life. Maggy

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thought this ridiculous. A war was a war and everyone knew how those warnings went wrong. The police delayed acting so as to rouse public feeling against the bombers—for how much anger could be generated if explosions hurt nobody, going off with the mild bang of a firework display? Property owners would be indignant, but the police needed wider support than theirs. Yes, the police were undoubtedly the culprits. They bent rules. Detective Inspector Coffee had been bending rules when he told the nerve-shot Sean that he'd put the word about in Irish pubs that Sean was an informer unless he became one. An old police trick! It had landed men in a ditch with a bullet in the neck before now. How many had Dectective Inspector Coffee nudged that way? How many more would he? None, because Maggy had got him with Dizzy's bomb.

"For personal reasons," she told Glass Eye.

"It's *what* you did that counts."

What she had done astounded her. She had been like one of those mothers who find the sudden strength to lift lorries and liberate their child. Unthinkingly, almost in a trance, she had phoned the number given her by Rosheen and asked for an appointment. She had information of interest, she promised, and evidence to back it up. Could she bring it round at once? Where she'd got the number? Oh, please, she didn't want to say this on the phone. "*They* may be listening, watching. Maybe I'm paranoid but I've got caught up in something terrifying. By chance."

Her genuinely shaky voice convinced him and he proved more guileless than she could have believed for she had gone to the meeting fearful of being frisked by attendant heavies. But no. There were no preliminaries. She got straight to the man himself.

"Detective Inspector Coffee?"

He was the sandy-haired chap all right. Perhaps he had recognized her voice on the phone? She handed him a bag. There were documents on top of the device which was primed to go off when touched.

"I brought you papers. You'll see what they are. I'm afraid I'm a bit rattled. Nausea. Could I find a loo?"

He showed her the way, then walked back into his room. She was two flights down the stairs, when she heard the explosion. Oddly—she had expected her fake nausea to become real—she felt nothing but elation. There were shattering noises, shouts, a bell.

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She thought: that's put an end to his smile, his assurance, his smug, salary-drawing, legal murder. The word registered then and, seeing him in her mind's eye blown apart, she began to sweat. The smell was pungent when she reached the outer door where a policeman stopped her.

"You'll demand political status?" asked the glass-eyed man. "Go on hunger strike until they grant it."

"Political?"

He was impatient, the visit nearly over. A group in another wing of the prison were all set to strike. He was planning publicity which would have more impact if she joined in. "Listen, love," he said, "you're political or what are you?"

Political? The notion exhilarated. Old songs. Solidarity. We shall overcome. In gaol, as in church, that sort of language seemed to work. On a snap decision, she agreed and, in after-image, the gleam of his eye pinned her to the definition. As she grew weaker, her weathercock mind froze at North-North-East. The strike gave purpose to her days and, like the falling sparrow's, her pain became a usable statistic. "Get involved," commanded an ad in *The Irish News* which the glass-eyed man brought on a subsequent visit. "*They* did." A list of hunger-strikers included Maggy's name.

Her mind was flickering. Sharp-edged scenes faltered and she wondered whether thin people like herself had less stamina than others. It was too soon, surely, to be so weak? She had a fantasy—some of the time it was a conviction—that her lover from San Francisco had come and that they had done together all the things she—no: he—had always wanted to do. Like a drowning person's flash vision of a lifetime, a whole erotic frieze unrolled with convincing brilliance in her mind. Sensory deprivation was supposed to make you hallucinate, she remembered, but confused this false prison visitor with real ones. His eyes gleamed like glass. "Sentient," he had said of himself and "cold" of her, but her memory of him was bright like ice and cold. She *was* cold. It was part of her condition. And her mouth was dry. In her fantasy—or reality?—he offered her an icicle to suck.

"Don't talk," said someone, "save your saliva."

Now her lover was lying naked and wounded beside her and offered her his wounds to moisten her lips, but they too were dry and not as food and drink to her at all.

Vitamins and hormones were being used up.

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This was the prison doctor talking now. He had checked her blood and urine and felt it his duty to warn her that irreversible effects could occur.

"Jaundice," warned the doctor.

"Golden, gilded skin," said her lover. "Here," he presented her with a golden potato chip. "Eat this for me."

"Eat," said the screw.

"Do yourself a favour," said the doctor.

Maggy put the chip in her mouth. It was dry. She couldn't swallow it. It revived her nausea.

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PETER DAVISON

Wordless Winter

1. CLINICAL DEPRESSION

who cares what name you call it here it comes
curling around the house in the dark like mist
that has no dampness settling on my chest
like a weightless bird tell it to go away
shout clap your hands let them stare
this visitor has no parents where it lives
when it isn't invading innocent islands
I cannot guess for the life of me I guess
it must have habitation in my cells
imprisoned like a foaming lunatic shaking
the bars of my body keeping the entire penitentiary
awake baying me moonward night after night

who has seen low pressure neither you nor I
but to deny the fact of my possession by it
is to declare myself swept clean of devils
and weep goodbye depression hello anxiety

2. WILLING HER TO LIVE

Oh, she's dying all right. But maybe
no faster than anyone else,
as Mark Twain said in response
to certain inquiries.
Among the remnants of a harvest,
sweating and staring in my garden,
I shovel dark infusions of manure
across pale autumn soil
in layers of enriching history,
stuff that cattle had devoured,

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chewed over, passed through
before keeping a date with the butcher.

As I excite topsoil for next year
I wonder who will eat what's not yet grown
or whether anyone will plant it.
Wetly, blindly I keep shovelling.
Earth snatches compost back
like a transfusion and will not pause
to keep a leaf attached
in response to prayers or tears
or the use of shovels.

3. FROZEN DROUGHT

Surprising sunshine has ruled more than a hundred days
of this bare winter. Snow has forgotten itself.
The ground lies hard as stone and flat with dust
as though the surface were peeling in the wind
and blowing off to hell or to dust-heaven.
Neighbors and newspapers speak of the oddity,
snowless New England! Week after week blows by
and the ground grows dryer and the teeth grit.
The nose seals up against an invasion
of drought in Eastern air that never tasted
the brown dark of the dust over bleeding Kansas.

4. HOUSEHOLDER

What can explain this ebb-tide of emotion,
this failure of joints and parts,
this position, as intolerable as
a turned turtle?
Hand will not clench on its pen,
head mislays its calling.
Heart? Content to keep beating.

This unfever has its blessings:
the bleaching out of anger.

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A sensibility confined
to the predictable.
Indoor plants, domesticated animals.
No wild birds, no wild weather.
An implacable appetite
for things as they are. A nice gratitude
for the unresisted passage of time.

As householder I have felt
entitled to hope for better.
Now I pray to keep out of bed,
ask for no worse.
My friends hear nothing from me
once highly regarded, nor
do my enemies.
I have been taught by mixed blessings,
poisoned apples,
to sit apart, muscles clenched like marble.

5. AFTER WINTER SLAUGHTERING

Our pigs have spent weeks away from their pen,
but hoofprints frozen in midnight mud
remember in ice the shape of a thigh
that, slaughtered, severed, relieved of blood,
lies cold in the dark as a blinded eye
counting lineup shots of arrested men.

6. THE CLINIC

When you say, "You haven't
done anything wrong," you must mean
that if I had done it, it could not
be wrong, being my act.

Such high regard the doctor
professes for the patient! That my most
ravenous desire should be characterized
as innocently as a pail of milk,

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or one leg dreamily thrown over another!

Could you have meant that all sins
are equal, that there's "nothing
abnormal" in such behavior?

Then fact steps up with more
than moral news: *We found*
cancer cells on the slide.

You declare: "You haven't done
anything wrong." And I reply:
"Haven't I?"

7. THE WRITING LESSON

Miss Daisy M. Johnston enforced her rules:
no wiggling, talking, or gum.
Hands clasped, or flat on the desk,
never out of sight in the lap.

Miss Daisy gospelled the Palmer Method:
write, write, write with the arm, not with the fingers,
push and pull as though conducting music.
The pencil must be held airily, unsqueezed,
guided through wrist, thumb and elbow,
mastered by the shoulder,
guided by the waist.

Who, learning letters in this fashion,
could reserve sufficient breath
to shriek for help
when muscles clenched in complaint
and the center of the body disclaimed them
and the poet, hands flat on the desk,
no wiggling, talking, or gum,
felt the dark cadence castigate his arm?

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CELIA GILBERT

"The Empire of the Senses"

She opens above him
Like a crimson fan.
Pulling the noose tighter
Around his neck
"It moves," she cries
As his cock takes life
From his approaching death.
Together he and she
Ride out the crest
Of a final wave.
The body will not last
But the mind with ease
Consumes itself:
Serpent with tail in mouth.

These lovers have shut out
All the world,
Like a sliding screen
Its mute shadow moves
Over all their deaf nights and days.
In the geisha house the women
Avert their eyes
From these rutting two
And their unfathomable thirst.
Like demons
Wailing all night outside
A rain-swept door,
Like the infant
Hooded in chaos,
Imperiled by need,
They rage, death
Their only boundary.

Call her a chalice,
Call him the honeyed stamen,

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Their lust is the same:
Devour everything.
Snow drifts over
The skin of the day.
Tides drain the blue from the sky.
The winner is the one
Who goes out first,
Leaving the other
To an empty room.

The Constellation

Stretched out and looking
down at myself
I see how I fall away into
curves and necessities.

I am neither Olympia,
athletically trim in her
armored nudity, nor

the Odalisque, all squinty-eyed
sensuality, naked despite
her flowered upholstery.

I am not what the painters paint.
They copy what they've
been told they see.

Moving awkwardly, then without shame,
I construct myself: points of light
extending over a dark cosmos,

presiding over
a fragrance of heat
rising from the roadside
hymned by flies.

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In Memoriam: J. B.

I see you at your desk, see your old-fashioned
German script, the letters large and broad.
You are writing to your oldest friend, "This is to be
The night of fulfillment." The sinking light that silvers
The full-leaved trees of summer lies on your shoulders.
You sense the house about you. Now that he is gone
How alive inanimate things are: armchair, sideboard,
Painting, dish; in them a pulse still beats wanting your
Attention, your presence, to move among them as they hold
And encompass you, like the pictures
Of the family in their frames: children, grandchildren
Those who gathered around you at his grave.
Turn, stay, for your going leaves too many questions.

"I am so ready to go," you write, sealing the letters
To the school friend, to the children and cousins.
In your garden the vines grow in decorum along
Their strings. On the garden wall the espaliered apple
Conforms its span to an apportioned grace.
The two of you loved like the birds who draw near
In the twilight, speech smoothed by time to plainsong.
"Are you comfortable? Is there something?
Come closer to the light."

Now you are shutting the doors.
Now you are climbing the stairs.
Now you are feeling how light the ties
Have always been that tether us to life.
And in your breath as you move, now quick,
Now slow, you see yourself
Closing his eyes, thinking, our lives, his and mine
Since childhood together, how quick, how slow.

You wash with care, then lay yourself out.
The pills are small stones, the water shines in the glass.
Like a medieval knight in the woods you open

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Your arms to death and wait.
Who dies like this anymore, radiant and attentive,
The garment that was you, worn to translucence?
Here, an ocean away, I climb my stairs and copy out
Your words of joy, asking, could this ever be me?
Will my death sum up my unruliness, as yours
Your order and your will?

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RUTH FAINLIGHT

Passenger

Not watching trains pass and dreaming of when
I would become that traveller, glimpsed
inside the carriage flashing past a watching
dreaming child, but being the passenger

staring out at tall apartment blocks
whose stark forms cut against the setting sun
and bars of livid cloud: balconies crowded
with ladders, boxes, washing, dead pot-plants;

into lighted, steamy windows where women
are cooking and men just home from work, shoes
kicked off and sleeves rolled up, are smoking, stretched
exhausted in their sagging, half-bought chairs;

under viaducts where children busy
with private games and errands wheel and call
like birds at dusk: all that urban glamour
of anonymity which makes me suffer

such nostalgia for a life rejected
and denied; makes me want to leave the train,
walk down the street back to my neighborhood
of launderettes, newsagents, grocery shops,

become again that watching dreaming girl
and this time live it out—one moment only
was enough before a yawning tunnel-
mouth obscured us both, left her behind.

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VERNON YOUNG

Film Chronicle: The Bloody British Cinema[1]

BEFORE EVER THE BRITISH FILM NOW SEQUENCE (a footnote to the 18th New York Film Festival) was under way, *Scum* had already exploded, hopefully advertised with quotations from journalists who live a sheltered life as "raw," "uncompromising" and "healthily shocking." Derived, how authentically I cannot guarantee, from conditions alleged to have been maintained at the Borstal School, once a notorious correction center for juvenile delinquents, the film, based in turn on a "highly controversial" play, offers the not astounding thesis, in our morally blurred times, that such an institution is a microcosm of society; that the only way of surviving in it without paying tribute to the protection racket established within the system (and tolerated by the "screws"), involving servitude, payoff, forced sodomy and having one's face kicked in with monotonous regularity, is to get there first with the violence of your choice, hence winning the respect of thugs and keepers alike. Which is probably sound advice if you're as tough and as depraved as the enemy; otherwise it's as unlikely a solution behind bars as it is outside them.

Either all prisons in the world are alike and tend to produce identical fictions concerning their intramural structure or scenarists and novelists have been busy filching from one another. More than one American film I have seen in the last decade shared the ingredients promoted in *Scum* as revelatory and about four years ago there was an impressive German movie, never imported by U.S. distributors, *The Brutalization of Franz Blum*, adapted from a memoir written by an inmate (adult) of a German penitentiary; the format was identical to that of *Scum* but it was structured with greater complexity and its ironies were more intricate. Not that the resemblance invalidates the specific accusation professed by *Scum*. But neither does the accusation oblige me to praise the film, which I thought was a drag, despite, or perhaps I might say with the help of, actors who were so good at being unrelievedly vile that I didn't much care, after the first quarter-hour, what happened to any of them.

I suspect that Alan Clarke, the director, is a grievance buff who has noted that grievance films usually pay off. If not venal he is stupid if he assumes that audiences will rush from the cinema to reform their penal systems. In any case he's a bad showman. Being hit on the head with a claw hammer every seven minutes does not produce moral indignation but insensibility. By the time the film had reached its ghastly denouement, a small boy sticky in his own blood which he has released with a

[1] British, here, accurately or not, includes an item from the Australian cinema, at present worthier of our regard than the so-called New British which, in effect, means the *English* cinema.

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razor-blade, followed by an all-out riot summarily quelled by the authorities, I was ready to yawn. When I saw the film at its opening on 8th Street, the high point of the evening was a remark I overheard afterward in the Gentleman's Lounge. Said one joker to his friend, "Anyone left in the house at this point must be gay. The straight ones walked out an hour ago, during the sodomy episode!"

The Chant of Jimmy Blacksmith (Australia, 1978) is also an I Hate Yesterday film. Yet it transcends the category to which it is assigned by Australian history because the director, Fred Schepisi (pronounced SKEP-see), managed to orchestrate his injustice motif without persisting, like Clarke, in a *mezzo forte* treatment. His editing, terse and essential, is not without a touch of poetry; his recapitulation of class and racial bigotry in the Australia of 1900 does not reject the misgivings or the small inconsistencies of behavior that mitigate an otherwise unrelenting chronicle of persecution and revolt. Nor does he play down the enormity that transformed a congenial, obedient native into a fugitive criminal. Jimmy (his given surname was actually Governor) was a half-caste aborigine raised and more-or-less educated in a white mission; upon coming of age he was employed successively as a fence-builder, a police tracker and a sheep-shearer. Condescended to by women, exploited and at last grievously cheated without hope of restitution by men, Jimmy abruptly revoked the good nature with which he had accepted the tyrannies of status. The manner in which he took his revenge—he first slaughtered a household of women and in the film you're not spared a single stroke of the axe—was so hideous that your initial sympathy with him is of course shaken. His fate is sealed, even as he beats his way into the wilderness and finds another killing inevitable. Hunted down, he is hanged without trial. It's a pity that Schepisi lingers to let a troubled clergyman who had fostered Jimmy wonder out loud if the white community was not in some measure responsible for the boy's murderous assault and its sequel of doom. The reflection is a feeble anti-climax to a self-evident narrative and unfortunately echoes a hundred conclusions to Liberal texts in our time. But the terminal shots of the film are effective. A closeup of the shuddering Jimmy in his cell, half his jaw shot away, while the hangman peering through the grill speculates on the resistance of his neck muscles, is succeeded by a direct cut to white birds flying above the Australian outback.

What seemed to me especially remarkable in a thesis film was the suggestion of concealed lives in the several characters—vicious, patronizing, lordly, or politely obtuse—who shape Jimmy's irreversible action. Kept at middle distance from them, so that the youth's tragedy will be foremost, you feel that an entire film could be made from any of the principals who impose themselves briefly and pass on. Credit for these teasing inferences belongs equally to Schepisi, who *wrote* the screenplay he directed, and to the excellent actors and actresses with whom Australian cinema is abundantly stocked.[2]

[2] Schepisi, now 41, was a pioneer producer of short Australian films in the sixties. His own first feature-length film, *The Devil's Playground* (1975), a painstaking reconstruction, more facetious than wounded, of his growing up in a Catholic seminary, has not been shown in the U.S.A., as of September, 1980.

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Another species of aborigine is featured in *Bloody Kids*, the most spirited English-language film from anywhere that I can recall among this year's releases. English is a euphemism for its *spoken* language, which is Cockney at various levels of distortion; the *film* language, now laconic, now fluent and accelerated to madness, is a creation (surprisingly, for television) of at least four masters: Stephen Poliakoff, a theater celebrity to whom is attributed the conception and screenplay; Stephen Frears, director; Chris Menges, the photographer; and George Fenton, composer of the last-day-on-earth musical score. Reminiscent of certain American films wherein there is no world save that of the outlaw and the police, everybody else has gone to bed—(cf. *The French Connection, Mean Streets, The Friends of Eddie Coyle, The Warriors*)—the setting is one of those sterile sub-cities, their anonymities identical from Stockholm to Los Angeles, and probably Murmansk.

Two insurgent sprats, aged eleven, while not the only begetters of a customary weekend in hell for a hounded police captain, are prominent among the vandals of the hour and authors, on this occasion, of the last straw (until the next weekend). Leo is a terrible pale boy with hooded eyes, just waiting to grow up into ungovernable fury. Mike, his straight man, is Mussolini of chest and jaw; he wears red hair, a pimply face and a perpetual frown with which he interrogates his way out of the maze in which everyone he confronts seems intent on confining him. On Leo's inspiration, to stir things up and test the enemy, they stage a mock battle, equipped with a blood bag stolen from the school's prop room. Mike flees, as instructed, not knowing that he has in fact knifed his friend and histrionic opponent. Upon recovery in the hospital, Leo spends half the night inventing slanderous tales of his chum's dangerous character. Mike, himself, on the town, is taken in tow by a felonious freak of the disco set, who, in order to "make something happen" (he's a frightening forecast of Leo's destiny), smashes the window of a TV shop in a wild dash with other punks through a deserted shopping mall, steals a car, races the telecameras set up to detect lawless drivers, plays tag with a careening double-decker bus and, as a stretcher case, finally makes something happen. Mike gets to the hospital, fights furiously to prevent Leo from staging another outrage but Leo, at maniacal pitch, contrives to set off the fire alarm, and the film closes down with the two boys backed by the carnage Leo has wrought: firemen storming the corridors, bedridden patients dragged from their wards, prepared for evacuation. Mike incredulous, Leo contemptuously satisfied, they light up.

As I suggested above, the police captain (played with a disarming lack of glamor by Jack Douglas) is the adversary under siege, society's surrogate. With no gun or stick, no uniform to advertise his authority, he depends on his own long-limbed strength, his easy habit of command, his astute knowledge of the offenders hauled before him. Never in the film, at his most enraged, does he *run*; he *walks fast*, hands deep in the pockets of his Yankee-fashion trousers, low on the hips, barking orders to a staff which, all but one obtuse PC, appears to have vanished into the night. When he goes to the switchboard annex he finds not a single operator on

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duty; when Leo wanders from his hospital bed, he can't locate an attending nurse. The Empire, with its lackeys, has withdrawn. He's the only satrap remaining to defend Law, a whisper in the dark, against Chaos.

Neither Ken Loach nor Nicolas Roeg is new to English film-making; each has been around for at least ten years. Roeg's latest, of which more in a minute, is in no way "British." Loach's *The Gamekeeper* is Little England inverted. *Bloody Kids* should have been Loach's movie (were he capable of wit); in a sense it extends the consequences prophesied by *Kes*, the memorable film he made a decade ago, from a novel by Barry Hines, about a boy beset by home and school, trying to raise a falcon. *The Gamekeeper*, a reconstructed documentary (also from a book by Hines), is far less sanguine and to a degree remote, since George Purse, the man of the title, whom we follow through the seasons on an estate, speaks a thick Yorkshire dialect. (In his previous film, a period adventure story, Loach insisted on 18th-century Lancashire! If *I* find these idioms fairly incomprehensible, I'd suppose that Americans would exit screaming.) Furthermore, as played by Phil Askham, who seems not to be an actor at all and the worse for it (no one in the film is either deceptively real or persuasively histrionic), George is as wanting in facial expression as a Stilton cheese. Loyally identified with his absentee lord and master, the gamekeeper stands guard, restrains poachers, snares pheasants, sells rabbits, chases kids from the trees and foxes from their holes and cocks a deaf ear to his nagging wife who reproves him for being underpaid and for not having kept that secure factory job. Loach's overall implication is that if villagers, gamekeepers, poachers and shopkeepers were to join forces, a Trotskyite utopia would flourish in England's green and pleasant land. Given the premise, he has made a singularly tedious film, uninventive, talky and, considering the possibilities of the outdoor setting (and those of Chris Mengs, who shot *Bloody Kids*), devoid of lyricism. If you're going to serve the audience that hoary aphorism of Proudhon, "Property is theft," you can't afford lyricism or any but the flattest characterizations.

By contrast—I saw it the same day—I was relieved immediately at the promise of the opening sequences in Roeg's production, *Bad Timing*. But let me slip into something comfortable and I'll give you a qualified breakdown! For the most part, this film was engaging to look at, the narrative intricate and rhythmic, with Anthony Richmond's photography framing images of shock and beauty as the story pursues its syncopated course, shifting backward and forward in time from the continuous present of the luckless girl on the operating table, undergoing sundry violations like tracheotomy to keep her alive and well and available in a Vienna of Roeg's contriving. However, and regrettably, I must pronounce that *Bad Timing* is in the long run an exhibition of international *kitsch*.

I mistrust a director who poses as a revolutionary while "following the money" with pseudo-intellectual cant and disingenuous pornography. "I am concerned with breaking barriers"—this is Roeg speaking—"with challenging assumptions and moving the possibilities of film on a bit." The barriers he breaks are those of taste, the assumptions he challenges those of judgment. His wilful miscasting of the male principals goes far to

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repudiate his pretensions: Art Garfunkel as a lecturer in the Freudian arts, and Harvey Keitel (of all people) with long hair (of all hair) as a "perceptive Austrian police inspector"—perceptive and kinky, just to move the possibilities of film on a bit.

The triggering act is the attempted suicide of a destructive American nymphomaniac (Theresa Russell). As they rush her to the hospital and do horrible, helpful things to her with knives, pumps and swabs, the events preceding the catastrophe are depicted: depicted, not explained. We never learn *why* she has a fanatical compulsion to bed with everyone in Vienna except the zither player, while favoring a pivotal mate (husband or not), so long as he never questions her gregarious screwing. Perhaps we shouldn't *ask* why, but since Dr. Linden (Garfunkel), a research psychoanalyst, is also her insatiable lover, it seems reasonable to expect a searching diagnosis to follow his field work! In the event, he is the last person to explain just what has been going on in the movie!

The epitasis—if I may make so bold—is the police inspector's suspicion (warmed by a creepy personal suppression he is sweating to reveal) that the nervous doctor, strangely unable to define his precise relationship to the girl or to account for the time lapse between his discovery of her body and his phoning the hospital, has indeed had sexual intercourse with her *after* her ostensible demise from the pills she swallowed.

Yes, of course, it's decadent; and I hope my use of the term drives Richard Gilman up the wall! Spite, as well as perversity, may have dictated one issue of this nonsense. Keitel, a well-built actor, is never required to strip. Garfunkel, an asthenic specimen, is shown stark naked—I should warn you—in necrophilic copulation with Theresa Russell. He is repulsive to behold. . . . Were you to ask me point-blankly how Miss Russell looked, I should have to acknowledge, in all fairness—*she* looked bloody marvelous!

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Reviews

MARVIN MUDRICK

The Publicity Hound

THERE'S A MAGAZINE CALLED *People*, founded on the Andy Warhol axiom that in an age of publicity everybody has as much right to be famous as everybody else. Fame, which was once the last infirmity of noble mind, is now the first fruit of publicity (Warhol himself was the first fruit of publicity); but everybody's waiting in the wings to come on next and who in the world cares? except a world-famous noble mind who doesn't mind making use of publicity for the purpose of taking swipes at the culture that invented it—Solzhenitsyn, media hero, master of publicity, more than a match for mod America. Flashbulbs pop, reporters scribble away, the bearded prophet rocks the two superpowers back on their plastic launching-pads as he asks the question, Can politics stand up to publicity? and across the street in three black automobiles the KGB hunches by the dozen like disgruntled extras rushed by Central Casting to the set of a movie that was canceled just before they roared in with screeching tires. What a one-man act! not only would it play in Peoria, it would be a smash in Las Vegas. He makes the sign of the cross (Russian Orthodox style, striking a Slavophile blow for religion), denounces on videotape the fat smug pagan West mired in materialism, insists that Russia must find its own moral and political way (so long as it isn't communism or liberal democracy): it's a line we've already heard, he sounds quite like Dostoevsky, though even expressing the same moral and political views as Dostoevsky he won't be forgiven by those Western intellectuals—"liberals and democratic socialists" all—for whom Dostoevsky is the great exception, the supreme moral and political writer, the patriarchal breaker of liberal and democratic illusions (Beat me, Daddy), the conscience of the modern world; but suppose Dostoevsky were alive and living in Vermont? In *The New Republic* of May 3, 1980 Irving Howe chides Solzhenitsyn for "such sweeping jeremiads" as "your recent grand pronouncements about the decay of Western will, its lack of moral fiber in resisting communism, etc.," and notes that "your attacks on 'Western intellectuals' for . . . not protesting the outrages of the slave labor camps" are unfair to "other liberals and democratic socialists," among whom he numbers himself—"*we*, the others, have not been silent about the scandals of the camps, the outrage of the dictatorship." Howe calls his complaint "An Open Letter" and expects an answer, he reminds Solzhenitsyn that in *The*

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Oak and the Calf[1] (Solzhenitsyn's memoir of his last dozen years in the Soviet Union), "you write with anger about the fact that your letters to the Soviet rulers went unanswered." (Howe is sitting in a warm bath fondling his platitudes, Solzhenitsyn was a survivor of the camps out among the flying dead cats in the motherland worrying about re-arrest and imprisonment or execution or exile while writing those letters to Kosygin or Brezhnev or Suslov or—boss of the KGB—Andropov demanding an end to the scandals of the camps and the outrage of the dictatorship, so there seems some disproportion here: Howe is Peoria, Solzhenitsyn Las Vegas.) Maybe *People* will give the two of them a page each to debate the issue.

Liberals and democratic socialists are nervous about this throwback who anathematizes decadence and makes a pitch for priests and churches — next week, the Inquisition—but they can relax because though he supports the Ten Commandments nobody supports the Bill of Rights more enthusiastically than Solzhenitsyn, sometimes indeed he supports both God and man at the same time: "that very evening Western radio stations, God bless them, broadcast the news" (of the KGB's campaign to intimidate him as soon as *Gulag Part I* was published in the West); no question that he counts his blessings religiously, but (since as he says God helps those who help themselves) he is less interested in revelation and truth than in freedom and accuracy, speaking up and spelling out, "openness, honest and complete openness" against the futility of prudence (for more than half a century "it was because of personal considerations . . . that we had used our vocal cords so sparingly and let ourselves be bundled into the sack before we could raise a shout"); he never doubts that, however decadent, the West by the glare of its publicity has kept him alive (the dictatorship "goes in deadly fear" of "protests from public opinion in the West") as he decries "the crippling and cowardly secretiveness from which all our country's misfortunes come":

> We are afraid not only to say openly, in speech or in writing or even in conversation with friends, what we think and how things really were; we are afraid even to confide it privately to paper, for the headsman's ax hangs still over the neck of every one of us, and may descend at any moment. How much longer this secretiveness will last there is no knowing: many of us may be decapitated before it ends, and what we have kept to ourselves will perish with us.

If Solzhenitsyn hankers after a theocratic state (like, say, the Soviet Union, only using Jesus rather than Marx as a pretext), it's hard to imagine how he expects to get it by hammering away in the cause of freedom, freedom, freedom ("I feel that my whole life is a process of rising gradually from my knees, a gradual transition from enforced dumbness to free speech"; when he finds himself back in a prison cell because despite entreaties, warnings, threats, harassments he just won't stop exercising his mouth, the Nobel Laureate remembers all too well bleak morning in the camps—"There's nothing drearier than early morning in jail"—and is

[1] THE OAK AND THE CALF, by *Aleksandr I. Solzhenitsyn.* Harper and Row. $15.95.

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glad he raised a shout for freedom before they bundled him back into the sack); moreover sending the Soviet Writers' Union a letter that execrates censorship as, of all things! "a survival of the Middle Ages" isn't likely to brighten the prospects of another but not unrelated anachronistic institution in medieval trappings; and Jesus' "Ye shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free" seems to mean for him not so much the truth of revelation as the truth of history and of conscience, what it meant for Tolstoy:

> people want to conceal, to forget the crimes committed under Stalin, to avoid mentioning them. "Is there any point in recalling the past?" was the question put to Lev Tolstoy by his biographer Biryukov, and Tolstoy replied . . . : "If I had a vile disease and I were cured and cleansed of it, I would always be happy to talk about it. I would make no mention of it only if I were still suffering and getting worse and I wanted to deceive myself. We are sick—and always no more and no less sick than before. The form of the sickness has changed but it is still the same disease; only it is called by a different name. . . . The disease that we are suffering from is the disease of killing people. [Tolstoy is talking about the war and militarism of his time.] If we recall the past and look it straight in the face, the violence we are now committing will also be revealed."
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> No! We shall not succeed indefinitely in keeping silent about Stalin's crimes, in going against the truth. The millions of people who suffered from these crimes demand that they be brought to light. It would be a good idea, too, to reflect on the moral effect concealment of these crimes may have on the younger generation. It means the *corruption* of still more millions. The growing generation of young people are no fools; they know full well that millions of crimes were committed and that nobody talks about them—that they are carefully hushed up. What is there, then, to restrain any one of us from taking a hand in other acts of injustice? These, too, will be carefully hushed up.

(He is addressing his remarks, in person this time, to an official meeting of the Writers' Union, and here are a few of the rejoinders from the other members: "Your time is up—ten minutes"; "I will honestly and frankly say that all of his recent writing—true, we have no knowledge of it, we haven't read it, we haven't been invited to discuss it—is at cross-purposes with what the rest of us are writing"; "We must all toe the line, go forward together, in orderly ranks—all acting as one—not under some kind of lash but following the dictates of our own minds"; "I wouldn't make any allowances for him—I'd expel him from the Union. In his play not only everything Soviet but even Suvorov is presented negatively. I completely agree: let him repudiate *Cancer Ward*. Our republic has reclaimed virgin and long-fallow lands and is going forward from success to success." There was a vote, and he was duly expelled.)

Finally "Christian" means "human." What Solzhenitsyn finds unique in the almost tragic but blundering and bamboozled Khrushchev is a "Christian trait" that most of us would be inclined to identify more uni-

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versally as goodwill, decency, as our ticket of admission to the human race:

> Khrushchev had told Tvardovsky that three volumes of documents on Stalin's crimes had now been collected, but that they were not being published for the present. (Khrushchev never carried anything through to completion, and the deposition of Stalin was no exception. He had only to go a little further, and no one would ever again have unclenched his teeth to bay about the murderer's "great services.") "History will pronounce judgment on what we have tried to do." (Khrushchev always became solemn and subdued when he spoke of our common mortality, and of man's limited span. This note could be heard in his public speeches too. It was a Christian trait in him, of which he was unconscious. No Communist leader before or after him, to east or west of him, has ever spoken like that. Nikita was a tsar who completely failed to understand his true nature and his historical mission, who was forever cutting the ground from under the feet of those social groups which would and could have supported him. . . .)

Still, *something* was done, though so much remains to be done. Hope too is a universal obligation for which Solzhenitsyn prefers a Christian term: it looks like supernatural intervention that somebody like Khrushchev, however flawed, could rise up out of the Stalinist cesspool—"the sudden fury, the reckless eloquence of . . . [his] attack on Stalin" at the Twenty-second Party Congress—but, besides, that a knightly hero *sans peur et sans reproche* could come forward out of the petted and privileged cadres is nothing less than a miracle:

> When Lenin conceived and initiated, and Stalin developed and made safe, their inspired scheme for a totalitarian state, they thought of everything, did everything to ensure that the system would stand firm to all eternity, changing only when the leader waved his wand; to ensure that the voice of freedom would never ring out, or any movement against the current ever set in. They foresaw all eventualities but one—a *miracle*, an irrational phenomenon, the causes of which could not be divined, detected and cut short beforehand.
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> Just such a miracle occurred when Andrei Dmitrievich Sakharov emerged in the Soviet state, among the swarms of corrupt, venal, unprincipled scientists, and what is more, in one of their most important, most secret and most lavishly favored nests—in the neighborhood of the hydrogen bomb. (If he had appeared in some obscure back room, they would have snuffed him out smartly.)
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> Creator of the twentieth century's most terrible weapon, Hero of Socialist Labor three times over (just like the general secretaries of Communist Parties whom he sat beside at meetings), enjoying the entrée to that narrow circle in which, whatever a man's requirements, the word "impossible" does not exist—Sakharov, like Prince Nekhlyudov in Tolstoy's *Resurrection*, woke up one morning feeling—or, more probably, he

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had always felt, all his life—that the abundance that threatened to overwhelm him was dust and ashes, that his soul yearned for truth. . . .

Solzhenitsyn thinks that Sakharov ought to have picked his spots more deliberately (though the government when they banished him to a city off limits to foreigners must have decided he was doing quite enough): he pays loving tribute to Sakharov's "large and generous nature, . . . his pleas for acquittal, reprieve, reduction of sentence, parole . . . [which were] the result of his constant, his incorrigible urge to champion the persecuted," but he concludes it was Sakharov's very virtues of kindness and fearlessness which impelled him to scatter his energies at every request and in every direction, which may therefore have undercut his effectiveness, made him into a sort of scarecrow figure, the skeleton at the feast, the marcher with the sign announcing doom (within minutes of Solzhenitsyn's arrest Sakharov—who else?—was picketing the Public Prosecutor's Office), and which eventually produced in him the one strong feeling that Solzhenitsyn seems incapable of—a "general hopelessness . . . [regarding] our country's future: we would never succeed in any of our endeavors, and they made sense only insofar as they satisfied a moral need. (I had no very substantial arguments against this; it was just that against all reason I had never in my life experienced this hopelessness, but on the contrary had always had a sort of stupid faith in victory.)"

Solzhenitsyn's blessedly stupid hopefulness is a matter of temperament all right: "I believed that there would be better times and even that I was destined to see them, believed that an age of complete freedom of the press would someday dawn" (and everybody would get to say everything and the Earthly Paradise would begin); even when he is arrested at last and sitting in a cell, he has "no doubt" that he will be taken to "see the government" and that there in the lowermost circle of hell on earth he will be able to "budge" them. But his hopefulness is also, from decades of frustration, reluctant to recognize the good reasons for hope: though he can hardly credit it something has happened, he keeps glancing at it though less to draw inferences from it than to brush it aside with impatience and puzzlement as if it will turn out to be an illusion or a mere lull: the fact is that despite jarring setbacks and heartbreaking missed chances, despite the country's failure to "take advantage of those first few months after the Twenty-second Congress, months of unrepeatable freedom," things have changed since the death of the Ogre. (Ogres are like mules, half horse's ass, half donkey's bray, quite sterile.) In the good old days torture and a bullet solved all problems: people disappeared and nobody thought to ask where on earth good old So-and-so might possibly be these days ("How much land does a man need?" asked Tolstoy in his parable about death, and Stalin gave the correct answer—"Six feet under"—millions of times over). Decades later, the crude and blighted bureaucrats who have inherited the Ogre's realm would dearly love to carry on in the Ogre's posthumous shadow, but they don't have his cannibal appetite for swallowing people toenails and all, the same words and tactics no longer bear the same lethal charge—"although *Pravda* had chosen this very time

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to walk all over me, Tvardovsky and I *did not so much as mention it* in our conversation. Even to him, abuse from *Pravda* no longer meant a thing. Ah me, how times had changed!" Terror for the sake of appetite as by ogres is infinitely more terrifying than terror for the sake of tenure as by functionaries trying to hang on to their sinecures: "But now, with *Gulag* in their claws, as they carried it from desk to desk (and hid it in safes, I daresay, to keep it from their own colleagues), passing it directly from the experts to the top bosses, right up to Andropov himself, the blood must have turned to ice in their veins: such a publication might be fatal to the system. (To hell with the system: their soft jobs were in danger!)" And they are so sensitive! "Even gangsters want to be loved," as another exiled dissident, Vladimir Bukovsky, remarked compassionately. Their feelings are hurt, and the culprit will have to pay.

So why don't they come and take him? "What was the point of all this barking? . . . For my own part, I saw the very existence of the newspaper campaign as a victory for me; in their eagerness to deafen the world, *they* had forfeited the chance to do what they would once have done—quietly take my throat in their teeth, and sling me in the jug." He remembers learning earlier that "'Your case has been passed to the Public Prosecutor.' My 'case,' that time, meant my confiscated archive, together with *The Feast of the Victors* and *The First Circle*, and 'passed to the Public Prosecutor' appeared to mean that there would be a trial. (Why they decided against it then is an enigma. They would have done well to try me.)" Or: "To this day I cannot quite understand why they didn't take me at the dacha in Peredelkino, why they slept on the job through Saturday and Sunday. . . . But why didn't they take me on Monday or Tuesday, instead of letting me trumpet the news to the whole world? Perhaps they had taken fright because I put up such a noisy resistance." The strain of trying to figure out their inaction grows so great that when at last they do the obvious and come and take him he momentarily turns as hectic and panicky as if these twenty years have been only a dream of deliverance and he is back where he has always been, between the Ogre's jaws:

> I said no goodbyes—I was in too much of a hurry! (how soon would I be back?)—except to my wife, right by the door: with all those Geebees around us, it was like being in a crowded trolley bus. We kissed each other goodbye, unhurriedly, and with the realization returning that it might be forever. Ought I, then, to go back in? Complete our arrangements [for the safekeeping and distribution of those of his manuscripts that haven't yet been published]? Hang back, drag my heels for all I was worth? No; I was galvanized by shock. (All because of my first false step, all because I had so stupidly let them in—and now I would be on hot bricks until I had cleared the apartment and taken them off with me. In my state of shock I was in some confusion as to who was taking whom.)

—Of course they wouldn't have let him go back in, nor in the time it would have taken them to break down the door could he have done much

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effective disposing of incriminating papers. The entire passage from which these excerpts are cited pulses and shudders with his (groundless) self-reproach and *embarrassment*. He listened to them barking and barking and forgot they had teeth.—

> I made the sign of the cross slowly over my wife. And she blessed me. The Geebees were flummoxed.
>
> "Look after the children."
>
> Then, without a backward glance, down the stairs, not noticing the steps. Just as you would expect: a car had mounted the pavement to hug the main doorway (so that I would have less than one step to take over open ground—the foreign correspondents had only just left), and of course they had its door open and ready, as they always do. No point in resisting. I was well away now. I took the middle seat in the rear. One of them jumped in on each side of me, they slammed the doors, the driver and his navigator were in place already—and we moved off.

Just like in the movies. Terror has no imagination. Now at last he is regretful, now it doesn't seem so unthinkable that he ought to have got out of the country while he might have: "Not once in three years [three years earlier they had signaled that he might choose self-exile] had I regretted it: I had given them hell! The things I had said to them! Nothing like it had ever been uttered under that regime. And now I had published *Gulag* from the very best vantage point—from *here*! I had done my duty. What was there to regret? But still, it's easy enough to accept inevitable death, hard to accept death when you might have chosen to live."

As it happens they give him not death (the twenty years have passed, it wasn't a dream, the Ogre is safely stashed in the Kremlin wall) but their last twist of the thumbscrew, twenty-four hours of being arrested, taken away, frisked, stripped, physically examined, locked up that concludes with a KGB-escorted plane ride to—where in the world? They won't tell him—and then, as they shout "Put his hat and coat on him! Get him out!" and motion him (incredulous and hesitating: "I can't help looking around in bewilderment. They are not coming! The forces of darkness stay put in the plane, all of them") through the doorway and down the ramp to the airport in Frankfurt—there and then as they let him go and shout him out like an animal being shooed out of a cage they give him up willy-nilly to freedom and the full glare of Western publicity: smiling faces, photographers, movie cameras, and "A woman comes up and presents me with flowers."

Before they decide enough is enough and bundle him out of the country, he has lived lifetimes of rage and hope during these years, the calf will keep butting the oak "until the calf breaks its neck" or "the oak cracks and comes crashing down," he's a stupid optimist, he always brashly supposes that there's a community out there, that next time will be the charm because people won't indefinitely stand for what is officially and unremittingly passed off as the life of the spirit (Bukovsky recalls that already in his boyhood "I hated the humanities—history, literature, even

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geography—because they were so saturated with ideology that there was nothing left"): "pig swill," as for instance when "an illiterate idiot" who identifies himself as "lathe operator Zakharov," contributing to a "*diskussia*, a debate Soviet style," reviles the literary magazine *Novy Mir* (*New World*) in a letter to a newspaper: "We want everybody to march in step"; "we want a Communist answer; any other answer the working class will not accept." Tvardovsky, editor of *Novy Mir*, demands information about the lathe operator and a photocopy of his letter; the newspaper comes up with the information—Zakharov is *real*!—and prints a photocopy of the letter ten days after first printing the letter, the two "versions" except for their identical party-line sentiments differing in every sentence: "Observe," says Solzhenitsyn, "the confident (and justified) impudence of Soviet newsmen; no Soviet reader would want to compare two issues with ten days between them, so they had not bothered to touch up the single short page they now reproduced, and make it match the original article!" Surely sooner or later our common humanity will be moved to laugh or cry at such heartless cynicism and impudence, such insults.

A generation after Stalin's death freedom still beckons, the purifying tide of "openness, honest and complete openness" is inevitable, look! there's the light at the end of the tunnel, prosperity is just around the corner, the stone-faced clique of pen-pushers and paper-shufflers and pint-size despots can with a little luck be made to listen to reason. Solzhenitsyn uses every opportunity exactly as if it's the right one. Addressing the Writers' Union he observes that "The censorship . . . is not provided for in the constitution and is therefore illegal—a fact that is never publicly mentioned." He doesn't point out the interesting irony that the Constitution which fails to provide for censorship is Stalin's very own (written to his order by Bukharin shortly before he had Bukharin liquidated) or that anybody in Stalin's time who objected to censorship vanished instantly in a puff of smoke, or that anybody nowadays who objects to it is bundled off to jail or a mental hospital or internal exile or Frankfurt; but it's true that the Soviet government can "legally," on the authority of their Constitution, stop the censorship anytime they please. Yes indeed. Here's Solzhenitsyn's "dream" of the Soviet government: "Some photographer should put together an album called *Dictatorship of the Proletariat*. There would be no captions, no text, just faces: two or three hundred ugly mugs, self-important, overfed, lethargic, bloody-minded people getting into cars, mounting public platforms, towering over their desks—with no captions, just the words 'Dictatorship of the Proletariat'!" Why, except out of inertia, out of fear of losing their jobs, out of fear of anything new, out of the historical impotence they impute to the rest of the world, out of the logic of their ugly, self-important, overfed, lethargic, bloody-minded natures do they keep their fat hands closed round the throat of the present while blaming Stalin for the awful past? as Solzhenitsyn must be thinking when he reads a "new-era" anti-Stalin poem by his friend Tvardovsky and in comic despair is ready to absolve the Ogre himself—"Well, yes, here was Stalin again (as though he, poor lamb, mattered anymore!)"—if only to bring to everybody's attention the suffocating present. Stalin (only a man after all) showed what one man can do, Solzhenitsyn is showing

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what one man can do, and now if ever it's time for everybody else to get into the act.

During the 'fifties and 'sixties Tvardovsky, a man of goodwill (another "unconscious" Christian), the regime's token humanist and respectful explainer, was editor of *Novy Mir,* the one Soviet magazine that maintained any moral and literary standards: with an okay from Khrushchev he published *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich*; he regarded himself as a "Marxist-Leninist" and the horrors of Stalinism as an unlucky political accident; he was flattered to be "consulted" by "the men up top" on artistic matters and while in the halls of power was painstakingly fed bits of gossip he could carry back like an insider to his gratifyingly impressed artistic associates; he was a poet and critic by nature and talent and a flunky by conviction, a good man and a party hack, a loyal friend except when ideological pressures persuaded him otherwise (not black or white but tattle-tale gray), and he drowned his chronic uneasiness in drunken binges; he would take occasional unexpected brave stands on principle against ideology, but they never continued and cohered; at literary conclaves abroad he defended his country and his beliefs by telling high-sounding lies about his government and his friends; he tried for years to cajole and bully Solzhenitsyn into toning down his writing to an approximation of innocuousness that would allow it to pass the censorship, but after *Ivan Denisovich* nothing passed, the few sweet months of freedom were no longer even a permissible memory; he was forced to resign from *Novy Mir* and lost the will to work or live; after he is laid low by cancer and a paralytic stroke Solzhenitsyn visits him, tells him the latest news—since there's no news in *Truth* (*Pravda*) and no truth in *News* (*Izvestia*)—and reads him his latest unanswered letter of protest to one of the men up top, this time Suslov, the party ideologist, relic of the Stalin gang (on the occasion of Solzhenitsyn's attendance at a Kremlin meeting soon after the publication of *Ivan Denisovich*, Suslov "came up, took me firmly by the hand and shook it vigorously as he told me how very much he had enjoyed *Ivan Denisovich*, shook it as though from now on I would never have a closer friend"):

> [Tvardovsky] took it all in eagerly and sympathetically, and with movements of the head and inhibited gestures showed his far from inhibited feelings. He nodded vigorously, ironically, when I recalled that he had introduced me to Suslov. At times it even looked as though he were laughing, laughing heartily, but only with his eyes and his busily nodding head, not out loud. . . . You would start thinking that he understood everything—and a minute later that he understood only intermittently, when he concentrated. . . .
>
> When A. T. was particularly anxious to finish saying something and could not manage it, I helped him out by taking his left hand—which was warm, and free and alive. He squeezed my hand in reply, and in this way we understood each other well enough. . . . [ellipsis in text] Understood that all was forgiven between us. That all the bad things, the hurts, the troubles, might never have been.

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Three months later Solzhenitsyn visits him for the last time, and even then affection for a dying friend can't altogether overcome the indispensable distrust of the underground man for the courtier:

> to my surprise I found A. T. considerably better. He was sitting in the same hall, in the same armchair, still with his face toward the path by which people from the outside world came and went, while he himself could not struggle as far as the gate. But he had the use of his left leg, and of his left hand (which kept reaching for and lighting cigarettes), and his facial movements were almost as expressive as of old, but best of all, his speech was easier, so that he could say quite lucidly that my book [*August 1914*] (he'd read it! he'd understood it!) was "marvelous" and reinforce it by movements of his head and eyes, and by moaning. . . .
>
> Alas, even at this last meeting I had to hide things from him, as so often before. I could not confide that the book would be coming out in Paris in two weeks' time.

Tvardovsky was the best that the system could claim for its own, and at his funeral it can do no better than (as if in relief at the passing of the last citizen of pride and taste) flaunt its ugliness and provoke a characteristic protest from Solzhenitsyn:

> Long stretches of the adjoining streets were cordoned off—they had been lavish with policemen—and at the cemetery there were troops too (for a poet's funeral!), and hideously barking megaphones directed buses and lorries. The entrance hall of the Central Writers' Club was also cordoned off, but even so they dared not bar my way. (They regretted this afterward.) Against the incongruous crimson silk on which the dead man's head rested (his look of good-natured, childlike resignation, his best expression, had returned soon after his death) and in which the whole coffin was swathed, against the truculent robot faces of the Writers' Club secretaries, against the grating insincerity of the speakers, I had no way of defending him except to make the sign of the cross after each round of speeches, once at the Writers' Club and once at the cemetery. But that, I think, was plenty for the powers of darkness.

Every eye in sight—policeman's, soldier's, robot-faced functionary's, kept writer's—must have been peripherally on this flagrant publicity hound; but Christian symbols have been used for worse purposes.

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GILBERTO PEREZ

These Days in the Holocene

"NOVELS ARE NO USE AT ALL in days like these"—not to Geiser, at any rate, the septuagenarian widower who is virtually the sole character in Max Frisch's *Man in the Holocene*.[1] Field glasses are no use either: "one screws them this way and that without being able to find any sharp outline to bring into focus; all they do is make the mist thicker." It has been raining for days on end in the Alpine valley, near the Italian border in the Swiss canton of Ticino, where Geiser lives alone in his retirement. The mail bus is not running: there has been a landslide, or perhaps some other mishap brought on by the rain, that has rendered the highway impassable. The electricity keeps failing in Geiser's house and no doubt in the entire village; a little wall collapsed in his garden, perhaps days ago, and his lettuces and tomatoes are ruined under the debris. If this rain doesn't stop, Geiser fears that "the whole mountain could begin to slide, burying the village for all time." Such things have happened before in the region, as he knows from his factual books, always his favorite reading and now an obsession with him. He must note facts, that "man emerged in the Holocene," for example, rather than waste any time on novels, which

> deal with people and their relationships, with themselves and others, fathers and mothers and daughters or sons, lovers, etc., with individual souls, usually unhappy ones, with society, etc., as if the place for these things were assured, the earth for all time earth, the sea level fixed for all time.

Since the mist is growing thicker not only outside but also within Geiser's aging mind, he must find something he can bring into focus.

The Holocene is the present time, geologically construed: the epoch extending till now from the end of the Ice Age. Not much has changed, geologically, since the glaciers retreated and left their mark in, among other things, the shape of Alpine valleys:

> In the main valleys the force of the glaciers was far greater than in the subsidiary valleys, and the rivers are in consequence deeper than their tributaries. For this reason the beds of the subsidiary valleys have remained higher than those of the main valleys, and the tributaries flow over sheer ledges into the main rivers. This explains the many waterfalls, which give the Ticino valley its wild and romantic appearance.

This passage is quoted by Frisch from an actual history of the canton, and throughout his novel various other passages are inserted which also come

[1] MAN IN THE HOLOCENE, by *Max Frisch*. Translated from the German by *Geoffrey Skelton*. Harcourt Brace Jovanovich. $7.95.

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from actual sources, including a twelve-volume encyclopedia Geiser consults especially often. In the encyclopedia Geiser looks up, for example, a procedure he once knew but has forgotten: "how to draw the golden section (A is to B as A + B to A; that he does still know) with compasses and set square . . . At the moment Geiser has no use for a golden section, but knowledge is reassuring." Geology interests Geiser more than geometry, however, in these days which might conceivably be the last of the Holocene. He also takes to reading the Bible, although he's not a religious man, does not believe, for example, in the Flood.

"No knowledge without memory," but Geiser's memory is failing him: "the things he does not wish to forget Geiser must write down in his own hand on pieces of paper, which he must then affix to the wall." Frisch includes several samples of these notes Geiser writes to himself, all done in careful block letters, some copied out of books, others containing "things *he believes he knows . . . that also deserve a place on the wall, so that he* will not forget them": THE CELLS MAKING UP THE HUMAN BODY, INCLUDING THE BRAIN, CONSIST MAINLY OF WATER or HUMAN BEINGS ARE THE ONLY LIVING CREATURES WITH AN AWARENESS OF HISTORY. After a while, Geiser gets tired of copying things from books, and instead, armed with a pair of scissors, he starts clipping out the passages worth remembering—such as discussions, accompanied by sketches, of amphibians and dinosaurs, which arouse his interest when he discovers a salamander in his bathroom. These clippings are also to go up on the wall, however, which poses a problem, since the slips of paper are getting to be very numerous and must be put up on the limited wall area at the right height for Geiser's perusal, and since thumbtacks don't take very well to the plaster on most of the walls in the house, only to the paneling in the living room. Once affixed, moreover, the paper slips have a tendency to curl in the humidity, some at the bottom, others at the sides, each day more and more, making it difficult to read them: they "will lie flat only if one uses four thumbtacks on each, but his supply is not large. So they will just have to curl; when one opens a window, creating a draft, the whole wall flutters and rustles." The supply of thumbtacks runs out anyway, and the scissors break when Geiser uses them to pry loose a bent nail in the wall—a task for which, naturally, he had wanted to use pliers, but when he found the pliers he'd forgotten what he wanted them for, and later he forgets where he put them. Yet Geiser is resourceful:

> Since the scissors, the usual ones, broke, Geiser has been using nail scissors, and after the thumbtacks have been used up, there is still a whole reel of tape, Magic Tape, which sticks on wall plaster.

These pieces of paper, together with the difficulties Geiser has in putting them up so as to bring them to his own awareness, may be taken to represent the last attempt of a deteriorating mind to make connections with the external world. But dinosaurs and the golden section, ancient glaciers and the Bible, are far removed from the world of Geiser's imme-

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diate experience, from the salamander he encounters, the house where "everything is breaking," the village and the valley that are still there even though the rain has rendered them as hazy as his memory. Frisch's presentation of this environment, his brief, fragmentary noting of certain facts of the physical world—red tables gleaming wet in front of a local restaurant, the iron railings of a ruined highway hanging twisted over a ravine—matches the discrete, documentary quality of his insertions of Geiser's clippings and notes. We seem to be sharing the old man's disconnected perceptions of an environment where the weather compounds his failing powers and his situation, in any case, as an outsider to the region: "There is no point in asking why Geiser, a citizen of Basel, settled in this valley; he just did." The facts on Geiser's paper slips are, in truth, modes of interpretation, ways in which he can try to make sense of the salamander by seeing it as a descendant of the dinosaurs (though "there were never any dinosaurs in Ticino"), or of the rain by seeing it as a continuation of geological processes inaccessible to the senses yet conceivable to the mind; but the facts of Geiser's environment, of his life and impending death, don't lend themselves readily to interpretation.

Frisch keeps us at a strict distance from his character, as he also kept us at a strict distance from himself in his remarkable autobiographical books—the *Sketchbooks, 1946–1949* and *1966–1971*, and *Montauk*—whose method he adopts, to an appreciable extent, in this new fictional work. Here he doesn't use the first person; in those earlier books he often switched to the third, and often used the impersonal pronoun (rendered in English as "one" or "you"), as again he does here, with the effect of bringing us closer to Geiser's experience ("one," though more detached than "I," is less so than "he"). In all these books he follows a similar strategy of frequent interruption and allusive association, generating an intricate interplay between the factual and the imagined, the immediate and the speculative, personal experience and impersonal reflection; and he employs a similar mode of description, at once sketchy and precise, matter-of-fact and at the same time markedly selective, finely honed, so that we feel as we read about these facts the unmistakable impact of an arranging mind. "The sketch has direction, but no ending," he wrote in the *1946–1949* book: "the sketch as reflection of a view of life that is no longer conclusive, or is not yet conclusive . . . " In *Man in the Holocene*, however, his theme is the conclusion to which our lives inescapably come, and the need this evokes within us to come to other conclusions besides rotting.

Death is a fact, of course, a certainty all men face, but different men have faced it in very different ways: it is, of all facts, the one that seems most in need of interpretation. In the past men could have faith in the interpretations offered by religion, but these, still acceptable though they may be to many in the present, no longer carry their former conviction. Although he's been dipping into the Bible, Geiser is not someone likely to change his nonreligious views at the last minute and summon a clergyman to his side; more likely than that is the possibility that he might kill himself:

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> For someone to climb on a chair, attach a rope to a beam on the ceiling, and hang himself, in order to escape the sound of his own footsteps—this is something Geiser finds it possible to imagine.

The entry on eschatology is among those Geiser clips out from the encyclopedia, but mostly he draws on the findings of science rather than on theology in his endeavor to piece together for himself some kind of picture of last things. What kind of picture can this be? Or, to put the question in a more general way, as I think Frisch is tacitly asking it in this book: how are we to die in our time, to invest death, in our confused and materialist age, with the significance it seems to claim from us, the beings conscious of it?

Geiser turns the days of rain into a cataclysmic vision, as if he found it easier to die if the whole village were destroyed, the whole human race wiped out like the dinosaurs: a geological version of the apocalyptic last days, offering the consolations of shared misfortune, but diminishing the beings made in God's image to the status of those long-extinct pea-brained beasts. This will not do; Geiser must hold on to his humanity even in the face of extinction:

> When Geiser looks in the mirror again to see his face, he knows that the name of his daughter in Basel is Corinne, and that the firm in Basel that his son-in-law has been managing, and which has since trebled its output, bears his name, even if Geiser does look like a newt . . .
>
> Geiser knows what he looks like.
>
> (A newt doesn't even know that.)

So long as he possesses knowledge, no matter if he can retain it only by the desperate measure of sticking pieces of it to the wall, it certifies his humanity for him. That salvaging measure leads, however, to his becoming more and more isolated: he's ashamed to let anyone see his bits of paper, the tatters of his consciousness that a rush of wind might sweep away. One day he braves the elements at great risk, but all alone, "unseen by anyone." It being "imperative," as the entry on geology says, "for plants and animals to adapt to new living conditions, to migrate, or to die out," Geiser sets out at dawn on a singlehanded project of migration, and in the rain and fog makes the arduous climb up the mountain and down into the next valley, thus enacting his own version of the biological struggle for survival. He appears to be seeking, as a lone individual, a confrontation with his creator: not the God whose existence he doubts, but the Nature proposed by science as an alternative. And yet, before a fresco of the Virgin Mary in the next valley—a fresco he regards with his usual disbelief—Geiser has a change of mind and heads back home: "What use would Basel be to him?" he reflects as he makes his return, a trek he finds still more difficult on the way back, owing to his exhaustion and to the onset of night. Basel, which he had planned to reach in his escape, was

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the place where he led his life, but he's cut off from that now: Ticino is the place where he has come to die, and this he must do on his own. To die in isolation, Frisch suggests, is a burden we all must bear in an age that leaves each one of us on his own to salvage whatever ultimate meaning he can from the bits and pieces of his experience.

A stroke Geiser suffers after his return accelerates his deterioration. "Presumably—he cannot remember—Geiser fell down the stairs": he finds himself lying at the bottom when he comes to. Then he finds himself elsewhere: "Actually Geiser is not at the bottom of the stairs, but on the floor beside the table; a chair has fallen over . . . " All the shutters are closed, he refuses to answer the door or even the telephone he lets ring all morning: it must be his daughter calling from Basel, and he must have answered at some point, since later he remembers having talked to her, though not anything he said. He knows he didn't tell her about the cat, which he roasted yesterday but could not bring himself to eat; since then he "can no longer face even the soup, because there is bacon in it." It hardly matters to Geiser that the telephone and the electricity are back in order, the birds singing again and the mail bus running. What now gets to be foremost in his mind is a memory of the time, which he recalls in full detail, when he and his older brother Klaus, long since buried, climbed the Matterhorn fifty years ago. The account of this memory, though interrupted now and again, is the most sustained passage of concatenated narrative in the book. That confrontation with Nature Geiser would most likely not have survived, even though he commanded then the full powers of youth, had it not been for the brother accompanying him. He has told the story many times, he and Klaus perched together on the Matterhorn, the precarious spots he was able to manage with his older brother's help; but he finds a peculiar solace in recollecting it now, as an old man dying alone and ashamed of having become a paltry thing. It's as if Klaus were again helping his younger brother, offering him, with this memory he left him of the two of them together, some relief from the awful isolation of the old man's last days. Just as it is not on our own that we best manage to survive, so, Frisch implies, it is not on our own that we should have to die either.

No solutions are proposed in *Man in the Holocene* to the distressful matters addressed. Religion is evidently not the answer for Frisch: his references to it are indicative, rather, of our enduring need to find something like it, and of our inability to satisfy that need unless by going beyond the physical, beyond the facts of geology or biology, and into the realm of the spiritual. Even as Geiser collects those facts, his feeling that knowing about them distinguishes him from a newt is already a step toward some form of spirituality. His brain is a physical thing, of course, and its deterioration a physical process Frisch makes us acutely aware of; but through the very faltering of Geiser's mind Frisch also makes us aware of that which is unique to the human consciousness and precious about it. With the interruptive structure of this book, the paragraphs often no longer than an incomplete sentence, the repeated phrases and recurring images, Frisch evokes the flickering of Geiser's consciousness as it impinges on this

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or that thing and lapses over the next, thus making us register all the more vividly, albeit in the rough, the give and take between mind and matter distinctive of the human spirit. Hardly a reassuring book, *Man in the Holocene* does not convey, either, a feeling of despair: without exactly holding out hope, it achieves a peculiarly bracing effect with its muted confidence in humanity.

The stories in Andre Dubus's new collection, *Finding a Girl in America*,[2] more often deal with losing, and with looking again for a girl in America. In one story, set before and during the Second World War, a man from Texas has a girl in his home town who seems ideal for him, but after he joins the Marines he gets to cherish his life with the troops, keeps her waiting for years, and finally cannot bring himself to marry her; he breaks her heart but the real loss, we are left in no doubt, is his. The greater loss seems to be the woman's in another story of conflict between marriage and career, which deals with a young pitcher of major-league potential who unknowingly neglects his wife in his devotion to the game. Even when not on the road, he has been virtually absent on the nights before pitching, needing "to enter the rhythm and concentration that would work for him when he actually had the ball in his hand"; and on the day when he is to pitch the decisive game of the season his wife tells him she's leaving him for another man. "Can't a man try to be the best at what he's got to do and still love his wife?" he pleads with her, but he can see it's no use, she's in love with the other man, an unglamorous small-town dentist with a wife and two kids of his own. Although the pitcher's impulse is to give his wife's lover a beating, he realizes he must do something that, like many of the demands of his profession, is "unnatural": he sets to regain that rhythm and concentration he needs for the game. Having lost his wife, he loses the game too, but not because he didn't pitch very well. His future looks bright, the pain caused him by his wife will pass, and what future can she have with that married dentist? Dubus tends to uphold in this book the values of that eroded institution, marriage: against the Marine who forsook his girl, against the wife who wouldn't stick by the pitcher and his dreams of being the best.

Skill as a refuge from pain, the pitcher's skill at his decisive game or that displayed, in another story, by a boy adeptly delivering newspapers from his bicycle with his younger brother in tow while knowing that, earlier that morning, their mother left home for good: this, among other things in the book, reminds one of that other eroded institution, Hemingway. Hemingway explicitly comes up at one point in the title novella, when the protagonist, a thirty-five-year-old writer named Hank Allison who teaches at a college in Massachusetts, mentions *A Farewell to Arms* to a woman he's in bed with. She hasn't read it, has little interest in literature, which is the chief reason Hank stops seeing her, the only woman his own age he has had an affair with since his divorce. Not that Hank shares the pitcher's aspirations to reach the top in his career—he sees himself "just as an unknown, average, .260-hitting writer"—but he thinks his

[2] FINDING A GIRL IN AMERICA, by *Andre Dubus*. Godine. $10.95.

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work "the best of himself," and places it first in his life even if his relationships with women turn out to suffer in consequence.

That was apparently his main problem with Monica, who told him so when she left him. She was the third young girl in a row, all students, to leave Hank after a year or more with him:

> None but Monica had told him why, in words he could understand. The other two had cried and talked about needing space. When the first left him he was sad, but he was all right. The loss of the second frightened him. That was when he saw his trap.

Now over a year has passed since Hank last saw Monica, and another student, Lori, a year younger, has taken her place. From this present time, narrated in the present tense, the novella makes its frequent excursions into Hank's past, the first occurring right at the beginning. High on the Tequila they are drinking in bed together, Lori tells him something about his previous girlfriend that hurts and enrages him beyond what he had thought possible: Monica had been pregnant by him and had had an abortion. That child unknown to him till now, done away with on Monica's wishes, Hank feels strongly was equally his—he's given to using the first person plural when talking about his women's pregnancies—and he very much would have wanted it. His rage at his former girlfriend is wholly understandable, the moral issues raised by abortion much more complicated than allowed for by the familiar argument one can imagine Monica using to justify herself, about the baby being part of the woman's body and thus for her to do with as she sees fit. Still, what did Hank expect? Readily performed abortions are part of the code of sexual behavior that gives students freedom to sleep with their professors without much thought of an enduring attachment—the freedom Hank has benefited from. And his marriage, from which he has a daughter by now pretty close in age to his girlfriends, ended as a result of his making it an "open" marriage in order to satisfy his itch for sexual experimentation.

I respect Dubus's earnestness, and his ability to dramatize these moral issues in the story of Hank Allison; but I think he relies on too simple a scheme in casting Monica as the frivolous girl who makes Hank see the error of his ways, and Lori as the serious girl who, as it turns out, truly loves him. Taken individually, they are both believable characters: the brief sketch we get of Monica is sufficient, and the fuller portrayal of Lori—her doubts about herself, her one unsatisfactory sexual experience prior to Hank, her quietness in contrast with the aggressive flirtatiousness (and probable infidelities) of her mother—makes it convincing that she should have fallen in love with Hank. But the place Dubus assigns the two of them in Hank's life is too pat. Not only has Hank lost all desire for sexual experimentation, he can't even make love to Lori after he hears from her about the abortion, and in a touching scene near the end he tells her he can't again: "Ever. With anyone. Unless both of us are ready for whatever happens . . . I'm going to court you. And if someday you say you'll marry me, then it'll be all right . . . " Yes, she says right then and

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there, since that's what she's wanted herself but in her shyness hasn't expressed in all the time she's been sleeping with him: lucky for Hank to have found an old-fashioned girl to coincide with his belated conversion to old-fashioned courtship and marriage.

Paul Theroux is a cool customer: nothing earnest about him. As his last novel, *Picture Palace,* made clear to me, his strongest talent is for wit. That novel, his best so far in my opinion, is also his funniest, a mordant portrayal of the world of art photography, its pretensions and reputations; and the cold eye of the narrator, a celebrated (fictional) woman photographer, falls also, incidentally, on a man of her acquaintance: "the American sportsman and storyteller, Ernest Hemingway." There is much I found equally funny and incisive, or nearly so, in Theroux's new collection, *World's End and Other Stories.*[3] The narrator of one story, a young homosexual, gets to meet through his lover in the publishing business some literary figures whose work he hasn't read but whom he starts inviting to dinner, finding to his surprise that they not only accept but come back, and hardly ask him any questions about his own nonexistent work: "It had only been necessary to learn a new language" of flattery and cant phrases for him to set up his unintended parody of a literary *salon.* Another story is about an English professor at Amherst, tenured thanks to his edition of the family letters of some obscure American poet who was also the subject of the one article he has written for the *TLS,* though since then he has been posing as a regular contributor, "often claiming credit for anonymous reviews he admired." In one of the summers he regularly spends in England, hoping to catch at least some glimpses of literary life there which he can aggrandize in the fall when he gets back to the department, he tracks down another, much better-known American poet, a reclusive expatriate whose electric shaver he offers to mend so as to get the rare opportunity of being invited into the great man's house. While fiddling with the shaver, however, the professor makes the bad mistake of pretending to have written a review of the poet's work that had incensed him, as instantly becomes obvious when the professor finds himself thrown out of the house, whose lights, moreover, now all go out as a result of his bungled mending. Perhaps funniest of all is the last story in the book, cast in the form of acknowledgments to the many persons who invaluably contributed to the completion of a book written by another American scholar and researcher in Britain:

> It is impossible for me adequately to describe the many ways in which Lady Mary aided me in the preparation of this work; she met every need, overcame every obstacle, and replied to every question, the last of which replies, and by far the hardest, was her affirmative one when I asked her to be my wife.

The importance of being earnest does show to Dubus's advantage, however, if one compares the novella in his collection with that in Theroux's, "The Greenest Island," which deals with a rather similar subject: a

[3] WORLD'S END AND OTHER STORIES, by *Paul Theroux.* Houghton Mifflin. $9.95.

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young man who wants to write and the girlfriend he has made pregnant. They go away together to Puerto Rico, where they set up house: she's going to have the baby—the time is 1961, and abortion to her means "knitting needles"—but it's evident from the beginning that they're not going to get married, and his taking a menial job to support them like an ordinary husband only underscores that "their marriage would be . . . a trap, the end of their lives"—certainly of the life he dreams of as a writer. The Puerto Rico Theroux portrays seems like a hopeless place to live, an island that is green but has nothing to offer otherwise, the exact equivalent of the trap their marriage would be: nothing to be done there except, in only a matter of time, get out—as indeed the young man does at the end, when he walks away from his job and by implication from all the rest. Fair enough: he has been decent in a bad situation, his leaving may be tough on his girlfriend but he has his own life to live. Theroux's dispassionate attitude seems to me unobjectionable, but it prevents him from bringing much urgency to this material, and I found his novella for the most part tiresome in its stretching out of a foregone conclusion.

Several of the African stories in Nadine Gordimer's new volume, *A Soldier's Embrace*,[4] are built around an eloquent moment, a juncture at which past and future meet with peculiar resonance. Such is the moment of the embrace in the title story. In an unnamed African country, after a long war, it is the day of liberation from colonial rule, and past and future, "peasant boys from Europe who had made up the colonial army and freedom fighters whose column had marched into town," come together into an exultant crowd of white and black soldiers, of vanquished and victor commingled, "grinning and laughing amazement." A white woman, caught in the crowd, joins in an embrace between two former enemies, "the rough pile of an army haircut on one side, the soft negro hair on the other," and kisses each of them on the cheek before the embrace breaks. She and her husband, committed as they have been to the cause of liberation, had long looked forward to this day, but after it, when they find themselves increasingly isolated from the ensuing developments and eventually decide to leave the country, she can only look back to that embrace as an ideal moment that couldn't be sustained. In another story, an adolescent boy gets to see his somewhat older female cousin naked: a cousin he had been close to during childhood but has hardly seen since she strayed from the family and, as he has heard from dismayed reports, into a life of drugs, suicide attempts, police stations, psychiatric clinics: "such days could bear no relation to everyday." And there she is now, naked in the living room of his suburban home, unconscious of his gaze as she's about to try on the dress his parents have bought her as a birthday present: the first woman he has seen naked. When children, they "used to play 'doctor' together for hours," he and the cousin before him, now a grown woman who, though young and pretty, has led such a life that her body shows the marks of damage and decay. The moment of nakedness soon passes, but not before it has provided an epitome of what was and is to come:

[4] A SOLDIER'S EMBRACE, by *Nadine Gordimer*. Viking. $8.95.

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> What he had seen for the first time was woman's nakedness, all stages of change and deterioration, of abuse and attrition by pain, loving and unloving use, he would be seeing as he lived and knew women. What he was feeling was deep distasteful awe at the knowledge of their beauty, and its decay.

In stories like these Gordimer approaches the evocative compression of poetry.

By contrast, two stories about love between the races in South Africa—where it is illegal, the parties subject to imprisonment if proof of sexual relations is obtained—are more like documents, and for all I know they may indeed have been derived from the newspapers, without much embellishment—little being needed on the detestable facts of racial discrimination in that country. The sense of tenderness Gordimer conveys between the lovers in these stories is all the more moving for being unstressed; and the endings are all the more dispiriting because in neither case do the lovers take a romantic stand against an unjust proscription—far from it in one case, which comes to trial after the man, a white, apparently murders his own child by the black woman. The mode of narration in another story, "Oral History," approximates what the title promises without attempting too close an imitation—which would have been a misguided enterprise, in English prose—of the way a tribe of black Africans may have rendered the story of the destruction of their village by the white men's bombs. Gordimer succeeds in giving us, at one remove, a feeling for how the war being fought in their midst might appear to these villagers—or rather, to the women and old men among them, since the young men have all left home to join the guerrillas fighting against the colonial government. The range of this slim volume of stories is considerable, and Nadine Gordimer has the talent to command it.

Gordimer, Frisch, Theroux—one might add Naipaul, Grass, Pynchon and many other names without exhausting the list—are among the writers who, in often widely divergent ways, have given a new prominence to historical fact in contemporary fiction—or at least have assigned it a new role. Three recent novels, one Brazilian, one German, the third by an expatriate Russian, deal with historical subjects in a manner hard to imagine being more different from one book to the next. I'll begin by discussing the Russian book, *The Nobel Prize*,[5] to me the least interesting of the three—for the treatment, not the subject matter, which is of great interest indeed. Rather than a novel, I wish the author, Yuri Krotkov, had written a memoir on this subject which he knew at first hand, as a leading literary figure in Soviet Russia at the time and an insider to political circles. The central character of Krotkov's novel is Boris Pasternak, who at the beginning has just been awarded the Nobel Prize after the publication, in the West, of *Doctor Zhivago*; around him, his wife, son, mistress, friends, his neighbor Fedin (a talented writer and once his friend, but now the conveyer of official threats to Pasternak); as a separate but very per-

[5] THE NOBEL PRIZE, by *Yuri Krotkov*. Translated from the Russian by *Linda Aldwinckle*. Simon and Schuster. $12.95.

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tinent cast of characters, Nikita Khrushchev and his wife Nina, the KGB chief Serov, Mikoyan, Brezhnev in a minor part, assorted other Soviet leaders. "Tolstoyan in sweep and power," says the dust jacket; "a splendid work of narrative art and an apparently authentic picture," says the reviewer in the *New York Times*. Much of the detail I have no doubt is authentic: the houses and habits of life of Pasternak and Khrushchev, for example, I assume were as Krotkov describes them. Often he clearly departs from what he could have witnessed or reliably learned, but I'm willing to grant him this novelist's prerogative so long as he exercises it to good effect. Sometimes he does, as in the story he tells about the Khrushchevs' reading of *Doctor Zhivago*. The Soviet premier didn't bother to read the novel whose author he decided must be threatened, vilified, coerced by any means to renounce the Nobel Prize. Instead he had it read by Nina, who liked it, thought it too esoteric anyway to have much effect on the masses, and recommended that it be allowed to circulate: an opinion her husband peremptorily disregarded at the time—but came to agree with years later, when Nikita got to reading the book after Pasternak's death and his own deposition from power. Whether or not all this is true—and that last part especially is surely outside the province of Krotkov's knowledge—it seems in character with Nina and Nikita, and makes a nice novelistic irony. *The Nobel Prize* is Tolstoyan in at least one way: in the omniscience the author assumes toward his characters, feeling free to let us into any scene that suits his purposes. There would be nothing wrong with this procedure, however it may distort the facts, if Krotkov could make it work for him; but most of the time he cannot.

Unlike other recent novelists who have treated factual material as if it were of their own creation—Robert Coover, say, in his portrayal of Nixon in *The Public Burning*—Krotkov strictly adopts the convention of realism: he asks us to accept all the things he depicts in his novel as being, not necessarily true, but probable, verisimilar. Although he doesn't seem aware of it, he set for himself a peculiarly difficult task: more than the semblance of truth we expect in any realistic novel, he must give us, in his exclusively factual context, something we can accept as if it were the truth itself. That task is easier with the Khrushchevs, secondary characters in the book and simpler, in any case, than the great poet he has chosen for his central figure, whom he must portray in full detail and invest with the complexity of the real Boris Pasternak. Krotkov's novel would no doubt pass muster by the standards of "socialist realism"—having repudiated the content, he still embraces the form—but as realism it fails to convince, and fails utterly with Pasternak, whatever attendant accuracies it supplies. Not for a moment could I believe in this stilted, incantatory Pasternak, meant to be high-minded but actually appearing simple-minded, forever engaging in contrived, grandiose discussions with his greedy mistress or his scientist son or a party henchman improbably sharing a room with the poet at the Kremlin Hospital. "The sketch"—to quote Frisch again—"implies mistrust of a formal wholeness which pre-empts the spiritual content and can only be a vehicle for borrowed ideas; mistrust of ready-made formulas which prevent our time from ever achieving a perfection of its own . . . " The rounded portrayal Krotkov attempts would

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tax the talents of far better writers than he; they, however, would have known to proceed with caution into the regions over which he blithely assumes command.

In contrast to Krotkov's unknowing presumption, Rolf Hochhuth's documentary novel, *A German Love Story*,[6] exhibits a watchful awareness of the difficulties inherent in re-creating the true story, which took place during the Second World War, of a love affair between a German woman whose husband was away in the army and a Polish prisoner of war doing enforced labor in her village in southwestern Germany. It would be a simple story—she in her mid-thirties, he twenty-one, both in lonesome circumstances—were it not the case that the man was hanged, under Nazi law, for making love to the woman, and that the ordinary law-abiding citizens of an ordinary village seem to have regarded that hanging as they would any other duty to be performed in the course of everyday life. "Insanity is a rare thing in individuals," Hochhuth quotes Nietzsche as saying, "but habitual to groups, parties, nations and ages." Hochhuth makes the love story and its tragic end the center of reference in a discursive investigation he conducts into that fierce insanity which became at all levels the normality of Nazi Germany.

As in *The Deputy* or *Soldiers*, plays in which he also engages the issues of that terrible time, Hochhuth alternates in this novel between dramatization and documentation. He sets forth in detail the absurdly convoluted racial laws which, but for a technicality, might have given the young Pole, as a result of the very love affair for which he was executed, his only opportunity to become a citizen of the Reich, since he was considered to be sufficiently Germanic-looking. In other passages Hochhuth includes himself, seeking information in the village today from persons still alive who were involved in that incident; among several others, in his research for this book he interviewed the woman—he calls her Pauline—who survived the internment in a concentration camp that was her punishment. The effect, in the passages where Hochhuth takes us into the past as he imagines it to have been, is as if assembled old photographs were springing to life as a movie. One such scene intimately depicts a woman and her husband: the woman a neighbor of Pauline's who coveted her greengrocer's shop and hence betrayed her to the authorities; the husband a fighter pilot on leave who was soon to return to the battle of England and be killed in it not long afterward. When, switching from an intimate to a broad historical mode, Hochhuth tells us about that battle and about the head commander of the Luftwaffe, he connects the small scale of that woman's opportunism with the immense scale of Göring's. Of all the Nazi leaders, Göring was probably the most sheerly corrupt: an intelligent man who was not himself an anti-Semite, he issued Hitler's order for a "final solution"; a brave air fighter with von Richthofen's group in the previous world war, he was now sending countless German pilots to their deaths in a battle which he must have known was lost by that point, but which he went on waging for no other purpose than to maintain the

[6] A GERMAN LOVE STORY, by *Rolf Hochhuth*. Translated from the German by *John Brownjohn*. Little, Brown. $10.95.

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vainglory that would keep him in power. While portraying the collective derangement, Hochhuth also lays responsibility on the individual participants, whether Göring or the woman next door.

Pauline and her Polish lover are no mere pretext for a general discussion of the Third Reich; Hochhuth insists on giving individuals their due importance, and keeps returning to these two in particular after broadening his focus. Moreover, he advances an individualistic theory of history, using Churchill, already a character in *Soldiers*, as his prime example here of the role one man can have in shaping the course of events. To be sure, Churchill played a major role, but I doubt it was so large as Hochhuth makes it in his picture of the Machiavellian cunning he sees Churchill as having exercised in outwitting Hitler in the early stages of the war—though I'm no expert in these matters and will abstain from argument. Along with the individualistic theory, however, Hochhuth advances, at other points and with equal vehemence, his own version of a deterministic *zeitgeist*, or something like it which holds a peculiar spell over the German race. Perhaps he intends to generate a debate, as he has done in his plays, by presenting conflicting interpretations, but here the interpretations are offered in his own voice with no indication that they may be debatable. Although surely right to make his presence felt in this book—not only in the interviewing sections but throughout, as the compiler of these old photographs and commentator on them—Hochhuth does intrude too often, whether or not one agrees with his opinions. His digressive method is a sound one, and he applies it well to interconnect the love story with many other things bearing on it; but he allots too much space to himself.

Márcio Souza's method in *The Emperor of the Amazon*[7] is ironical. Dealing with the Amazonian "rubber boom" in the late nineteenth century, this young Brazilian's first novel is presented as the last adventure story and told by a narrator who sees himself as the hero of a *feuilleton*. "Our hero existed in fact," Souza informs us about his narrator: "The picaresque moments in the life of Luis Galvez wholly conform to the vaudevillian politics of the rubber boom." The outrageous improbability of the incidents in Galvez's tall tale—which the author occasionally interrupts to put him right—expresses the incredible reality of what came to pass in the Amazonian basin when the sap extracted from certain plants abundant there started to yield untold wealth. That sap lured not only foreign adventurers such as the Spaniard Galvez—"who actually witnessed those cigars being lit by one-hundred-dollar bills, confirming firsthand what legend later rekindled"—but foreign powers such as the United States, represented in this novel by a consul named Kennedy who has "an irrational fear of contracting one of those terrible tropical diseases" and takes with him up the Amazon a black servant who prepares his meals for him with ingredients sent especially from America. There is also an English scientist, Sir Henry Lust, who believes that the Amazonas Theater, an enormous *art-nouveau* structure built in the middle of the jungle, was ac-

[7] THE EMPEROR OF THE AMAZON, by *Márcio Souza*. Translated from the Portugese by *Thomas Colchie*. Avon. $2.75.

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tually the work of extraterrestrials. And a French operatic troupe, featuring the *chanteuse* Justine L'Amour, is making a tour of these backward regions unexpectedly endowed with wealth and so to be graced with culture. On the boat upriver, in one of his rare ventures outside his cabin, Kennedy catches sight of L'Amour having sex with what he thinks is a corpse, and after that he uncontrollably wets himself whenever he sees her. That was no corpse, however, but Galvez in disguise, hidden on this boat traveling to Acre, a territory particularly rich in rubber where he plans a revolution to thwart the American scheme to gain dominance there. The dissolute, unscrupulous Spaniard has been enlisted as leader by the Brazilians who conceived this revolution: a partnership Souza implicitly compares with the much larger alliance between corrupt local notables and foreign powers out to plunder the country's riches.

Leading a band of volunteers—"eternal students, chronic vagabonds, unpublished poets, black sheep from august families, pettyfogging attorneys"—whose main aptitude seems to be for the consumption of alcohol, Galvez succeeds in overcoming the still more feeble enemy forces and crowns himself Emperor of Acre, managing in his court such pomp as can be simulated with the props supplied by the operatic troupe. His makeshift regime, instituted in July of 1899, survives till the end of December, his last official act being the throwing of a big party on New Year's Eve: the fall of the Acrean Empire takes place, in a drunken stupor, on the eve of the new century. The historical rubber boom was, by then, also coming to its end, which was as rapid as its beginning: Souza offers us the brief shoddy days of Galvez's glory as emblematic of that whole fantastic episode in the Brazilian past. Callow and coarse though Souza's humor may often be, his novel has narrative verve, and his fictional burlesque aptly comments on the facts of his subject matter.

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CLARA CLAIBORNE PARK

Ghosts on a Gold Mountain

THE ASTONISHING BOOKS UNDER REVIEW[1] are not long, and not at all difficult. A child could read them; children—older children—should. Yet though I shall pack as much as I can into this reasonably long review, I shall be able to convey only a little of their harsh richness. This is an unknown universe, and it is not obvious where to enter it.

I could begin where Maxine Hong Kingston began *The Woman Warrior,* with the story of No Name Woman, her father's sister, who gave silent birth in the pigsty more than nine months after her husband had left for America, whose body was found with the baby's plugging up the family well the morning after the villagers tore up the rice and killed the pigs and chickens and trashed the house and smeared the walls with blood. Her mother told her that story when she began to menstruate. "What happened to her could happen to you. Don't humiliate us. You wouldn't like to be forgotten as if you had never been born." Or I could start with the Woman Warrior herself, Fa Mu Lan, military commander, brilliant swordswoman, defending her people against warlords and bandits—another one of her mother's stories, the other side of the immemorial Chinese denigration of the female. The girl took the old tale for her own, grafting into it her own heroic deeds, so she could forget for a little while that "girls are maggots in the rice" and that it is better to raise geese than daughters. Or I could begin with the bound feet we all know of, on which her grandmother swayed from room to room, delicately touching the wall when the maids (slaves bought at market) were not near to support her. *China Men* begins with another old tale: when, long ago, Tang Ao crossed the ocean, looking for the Gold Mountain, and came to the Land of Women, they captured him, but in turning him into a woman they did not bother with castration. They bound his feet. The little American girl, growing up in Stockton, California, getting all A's in the public school where every thought had to be rethought in a new language, inherited her mother's power to "talk story," to make old tales new, in words almost too immediate to be borne.

> The old ladies squeezed each foot and broke many tiny bones along the sides. They gathered his toes, toes over and under one another like a knot of ginger root. . . . As they wound the bandages tight and tighter around his feet, the women sang footbinding songs to distract him. . . Every night they unbound his feet, but his veins had shrunk, and the blood pumping through them hurt so much, he begged to have

[1] THE WOMAN WARRIOR: Memoirs of a Girlhood Among Ghosts, by *Maxine Hong Kingston.* Knopf. $10.95. CHINA MEN, by *Maxine Hong Kingston.* Knopf. $10.95.

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> his feet re-wrapped tight. They forced him to wash his used bandages, which were embroidered with flowers and smelled of rot and cheese. He hung the bandages up to dry. . . . He felt embarrassed: the wrappings were like underwear, and they were his.

Or I could put by the woman theme and begin with the ghosts, since they are everywhere; the dead are restless if not tended, and all foreigners are ghosts. The grandfathers left China to live among them. Great Grandfather went to Hawaii, the Sandalwood Mountain, which sends out a sandalwood sweetness which smells, to men who have been crowded below decks three months in a sailing ship, "like a goddess visiting." Rainbows gleamed double there, and there were so many bananas that you didn't have to scrape the peels and eat the scrapings, you could throw them away. But it only looked and smelt like Paradise; he cleared jungle from dawn to dark, in silence and under the whip for a dollar a week for some twenty years before he went back to China. That must have been in the 1850s. The Grandfather who went to the Gold Mountain—America—had a crazy streak. He actually swapped his baby boy for a neighbor's girl. Grandmother made him trade back, leaving the house to teeter after him on little knobs of feet, shoving him ahead of her and holding onto him at the same time. But before that he had spent 20 years in the Sierra Nevada, shoved there too by Grandmother: "Make money," "Don't stay here eating." He, and thousands of other men of China (not chinamen) put through the transcontinental railroad, pickaxing tunnels under the hard mountains where the Donner Party had turned cannibal and died. After three years of hammering granite the white demons invented dynamite; it "added more accidents and ways of dying, but if it were not used, the railroad would take fifty more years to finish."

> Nitroglycerine exploded when it was jounced on a horse or dropped. A man who fell with it in his pocket blew himself up into red pieces. . . . Human bodies skipped through the air like puppets and made Ah Goong laugh crazily as if the arms and legs would come together again. The smell of burned flesh remained in rocks.

Nobody recorded the number of Chinese dead. You could die from sickness, or frostbite; you could fall from the wicker baskets in which you were lowered thousands of feet to the work site, only the lucky words painted on the baskets to protect you from the mountain wind. Crazy grandfather pissed overboard and shouted "I'm a waterfall"; once, overcome by the beauty of sky and treetops, "he stood up tall and squirted out into space," shouting, "I am fucking the world." When the railroad was finished the white ghosts made speeches: "Only Americans could have done it." True, too, for who had earned America if not those who built it with inconceivable toil and danger? There follows one of those loaded details which announce the difference between mere narrative skill and art:

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A white demon in top hat tap-tapped on the gold spike, and pulled it back out. Then one China Man held the real spike, the steel one, and another hammered it in.

But of course that was not the way the white demons saw it. The Driving Out began in 1868: *China Men's* seven-page summary of the history of the Chinese Exclusion Laws ought to be required reading in any course in American history; almost all of it will be news to non-Chinese Americans. In a work permeated with the fabulous, there is no breath of the fabulous here. The Rock Springs Massacre. The Los Angeles Massacre. China Men set adrift off Alaska without food or water. But the ancestors of this American—a Berkeley graduate, a teacher of creative writing, someone Like Us, no doubt with dishwasher and formica kitchen—were not massacred or set adrift. Nor did they remain, disappearing into slums where the white ghosts could not recognize them to deport them, since all chinamen look alike. Not settlers but Sojourners, they took their American savings and their stories of the Gold Mountain back to their Chinese village, came again, again returned, until 1924, when Maxine Hong Kingston's father came to stay.

I could begin anywhere in the dissolving chronology of these books where no clear order is apparent, yet every story is disposed with invisible art to resonate and echo. Each of these memoirs unifies its shimmering details in terms of its own experience—female in *The Woman Warrior,* then male in *China Men.* But the unity is fuller: to complete her exploration Maxine Hong Kingston (no one of her names, taken singly, makes a true statement) had to write both books, imagining her way out of the Yin symbol she was born to and into the Yang of masculine experience. The two together complete the circle.

One can enter a circle anywhere. Let it be with the little girl's theory that males feel no pain. To test it, she kicked a boy at school with her heavy shoes, armored with toe-taps. Sure enough, he didn't cry. " 'See,' I told the girls. 'Boys have no feelings. It's some kind of immunity.' It was the same with Chinese boys, black boys, white boys, and Mexican and Filipino boys." And with fathers; her father, BaBa, was silent for days, never wept. "Girls and women of all races cried and had feelings"; men were immune, except to anger. BaBa came at them with coathangers and brooms, striking anywhere, not like the orderly American spanking. He spoke to swear, to call them names: "Dog vomit," "Stink pig," "Your mother's smelly cunt." He said with the words and the silences: "no stories. No past. No China." He had renamed himself Edison when he came to America; the children had lucky American names. "Father, I have seen you lighthearted"—catching dragonflies once, tying threads to them, a toy airplane for each child. But not often. Men have no feelings. *China Men*, dedicated to the men of her family, brothers, husband, son, father, is a journey to set that straight.

He was born "in a year of the Rabbit, 1891 or 1903 or 1915." The name he took when he passed the Imperial Examinations was Think Vir-

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tue, a name "not as cerebral as it appears in English," the ideograph for "think" combining "field" and "heart." Think about that for a while in the field of the heart, a linguistic window opening on a universe of meaning. The books are full of things like that. BaBa was different from birth, skinny, with long fingers made for holding pens. It was a peasant family, never a scholar in all the long village generations, but this baby, at his one-month birthday party (girls never had one) was given the Four Valuable Things: ink, inkslab, paper, and brush. His brothers had got only money. "The house was ashine with lights and lucky with oranges." Grandmother sewed him little scholar's caps and scholar's gowns; he didn't work in the fields like his brothers, but practiced handwriting and hummed poems. His brothers wouldn't gamble with him because he memorized the cards; "Poetry Addict!" they taunted, and excluded him from their clubhouse. He walked four days to the city where the examinations were given—the five pages devoted to these must be one of the most evocative historical recreations ever written. He passed them—he was about fourteen. Grown men tried all their lives to pass the Imperial Examinations. "Winning, a scholar would become one of the philosophers who rules China. . . . All things good come to the mandarin scholar." If BaBa had won top honors he would have "flown" to Canton or Peiping. Instead he won the job of village teacher, a boy trying to keep order among unruly boys who cared nothing for learning. It got so bad he couldn't eat. He couldn't repeat the examinations and better his score; though they had been the avenue of advancement for a thousand years, those he had taken were the last ever given. He married and kept at it, but he "did not learn how hard and often students have to be hit to make them polite." When he couldn't stand it any more he escaped to the Gold Mountain.

There he worked in a laundry, morning to midnight, bought into it, sent for his wife, was swindled out of it by Chinese partners with Gold Mountain names, Roosevelt and Woodrow and Worldster. He managed a gambling house (part of his job was to get arrested in place of the owner, but because all chinamen look alike he never got a record), bought a house with savings squeezed from years of working-hours that contemporary Americans are just barely able to imagine, lost his job, at length ended up with his own laundry. The temperature there in summer reached 111 degrees. His daughter, imagining her way into what it was like to take the examinations, writes of the days in which the scholars waited to hear their results. In three sentences she stabs her way into the silence of that angry father.

> So he had once had three free days. He spent them talking to the other scholars, making friends, singing, touring the capital. Counting those you spent walking [Father], you had seven free days.

More than once, MaMa told of a special kind of feast people enjoyed in China when they had the money. They sat around a doughnut-shaped

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table while cooks sawed through the skull of the live monkey clamped in the middle; then they spooned out the brains and ate them. MaMa was a master of vivid detail; the little girl wanted to cry out "stop it," but she never did. Did the Chinese really smear bad daughters-in-law with honey and tie them naked on top of ants' nests? Did the Japanese really cut into a prisoner's side where he couldn't see it, take out an end of intestine, and tie it behind him and let him go so that he pulled out his own insides as he ran? It is not that one becomes immune to cruelty reading these pages; rather one feels that to go on reading is to consent to join the human condition from which we have, here on the miraculous gold mountain, so long been exempt. Famine: it is an old word. Were people in the Cantonese village where BaBa and MaMa came from really eating clay and bark? When the dogs and cats and slugs and beetles were gone, was the meat that appeared in the market really the flesh of babies sold by their parents? In the fifties, in the early years of Mao? *We were alive in the fifties. That's not long ago.* We defend ourselves with incredulity: surely it isn't true, as the grandmother wrote, that children grow coarse black hairs all over their body when they starve, so the other things don't have to be true either. Who knows what really went on in China and what was made up so the emigrants would send money? Yet the uncles were all dead, that was true; the husband of the aunt who escaped to San Francisco had really been pressed between millstones. It was a traditional way of execution; revolutions leave some things unchanged. Though it is not proper for young Chinese to respond to adults as equals, to the aunt's story the American niece risks the conventional old lady's response: "Aiya . . . how hard to endure." The words were developed by a culture to which they were indispensable.

This aunt is not imaginative; the girl likes her "use of exact numbers." Sixteen hotel-rooms in eight hours is too many to clean when you have high blood-pressure; MaMa would have said "Ten thousand rooms per second." "Uncountable. Infinite." So what can one believe? Facts? She doesn't even know within ten years when her father was born (though unless it was 1891, the Imperial Examinations, last given in 1905, are fiction too). Chinese adults talk story, but they do not explain things to children. Playing, the girl jumps over her brother and is beaten. No one explains what she later learns, that no female can position herself above a male even for an instant.

What is not explained, securely placed in space and time and logic, whether hideous or beautiful, takes on the quality of magic, becomes Romance. MHK has kept this way of talking story; her writing breathes the child's vision of wonder. The grandfathers in Stockton—brothers of the real grandfather—have a pile of horse manure taller than a human being, valuable stuff which they bag for presents. It's beautiful too; flies, "green and turquoise-black and silvery blue," hum round it "like excess sparks."

> Say Goong took my hand and led me to a cavernous shed black from the sun in my eyes. He pointed into the dark, which dark seemed solid

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> and alive, heavy, moving, breathing. There were waves of dark skin over a hot and massive something that was snorting and stomping—the living night. In the day, here was where the night lived. Say Goong pointed up at a wide brown eye as high as the roof. . . . "Horse," he said. "Horse."

Then the horses were gone. No explanation. They must have existed; proof is found in the family photograph album, incontrovertible evidence for horses. But another relative, secure in the California fifties with a house and mortgage and a new car, was visited by his mother's ghost, dead of starvation; he had to withdraw all his savings and take her back to China. "Those of us in the first American generations have had to figure out how the invisible world the emigrants built around our childhoods fit in solid America." There are so many ways to tell stories, so many versions to imagine into truth. The American offspring are "always trying to get things straight, always trying to name the unspeakable." "I don't want to listen to any more of your stories," the adolescent girl screams at her mother. "You lie with stories. You won't tell me a story and then say, 'This is a true story,' or, 'This is just a story.' I can't tell what's real and what you make up." Do people really sell girls? Now MaMa says it's a joke. "The emigrants confused the gods by diverting their curses, misleading them with crooked streets and false names"; they confuse their children too.

> I had to leave home in order to see the world logically. . . . I learned to think that mysteries are for explanation. I enjoy the simplicity. Concrete pours out of my mouth to cover the forests with freeways and sidewalks. Give me plastics, periodical tables, t.v. dinners with vegetables no more complex than peas mixed with diced carrots. Shine floodlights into dark corners: no ghosts. . . . Now colors are gentler and fewer; smells are antiseptic . . . Soon I want to go to China and find out who's lying—the Communists who say they have food and jobs for everybody or the relatives who write that they have not the money to buy salt. . . . Did my grandmother really live to be ninety-nine? . . . Do the babies wear a Mao button like a drop of blood on their jumpsuits?

Long ago when MaMa talked story until the children fell asleep, the little girl "couldn't tell where the stories left off and the dreams began." Reading these books, no more can we. But they convince us that this story of "The Making of More Americans" can only be told as fabulous; though *The Woman Warrior's* National Book Award was for non-fiction, the comparison which comes to mind is not with other memoirs but with a novel, with the superreality of *One Hundred Years of Solitude.*

Listening to the aunt from China, the girl felt she had nothing to share: "I have no stories of equal pain." America, for all its injustice and exploitation, has been kinder than that, even to Chinese Americans, far kinder to most of us. It is hard, reading these books, not to feel we have

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paid a price, glad as we must be to pay it. Our colors too seem leached out, by affluence (even the poorest of us), by security (no matter how many anxieties we nurture). These are books to buy, to lend to friends, to give to adolescents in these days of Boat People and Cuban refugees. They are charged with the power of need—the writer's overwhelming need to talk story, to summon art to search out and understand that past in which the fabulous and the true can never be disentangled. But it is finally we who need the book, as Americans, and as Sojourners in a world of wonders.

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EMILY GROSHOLZ

Mazzaro, Vendler, Freud & Co.

THE THESIS OF JEROME MAZZARO'S *Postmodern American Poetry*,[1] properly qualified and developed, is a promising one: that the generation of poets following Eliot and Pound faced the dilemmas of modernity more successfully than those two poets of the old world. Mazzaro claims that the modernist poets held language responsible for the fall from an original unity, which they sought to restore by proposing silence or the destruction of language. The tendency of modernism was thus mystical and unworldly, seeking its end in a realm grasped by nondiscursive intuition. To say the least, this is a paradoxical position for poets to hold—and yet appropriate for those unwilling to give up the dream of original unity, but faced with the prospect of contemporary social and linguistic disintegration. Modernism must then be considered not wholly modern, but a threshold phenomenon which faces backwards.

Postmodernism, as Mazzaro and others have defined it, does try on the contrary to come to terms with the differentiation (a more positive term for disintegration) and questionability of the social and linguistic structures we must live with. It therefore generates a more worldly and talkative poetry. Auden, Jarrell, Roethke, Ignatow, Berryman, Plath and Bishop are the poets whom Mazzaro chooses to illustrate his thesis; Lowell is clearly the missing link, but Mazzaro has written about him at length elsewhere.

The difficulty with this book, however, is that Mazzaro's thesis is not properly qualified and developed, for two related reasons. The first, which is perhaps a consequence of the second, is that too often the text consists simply of a review of the critical literature on each poet, spliced with bits of the poet's own commentary on his or her work. The extensive footnotes at the end of each chapter are almost more illuminating than the chapter itself; they could be used as a guide to what major and minor critics have had to say about each figure in roughly chronological order during the nineteen-thirties, forties and fifties. But the text is a patchwork of review-summaries and exemplary quotations drawn from the reviews; each page in fact is a thicket of quotation-marks. This mode of exposition is both conceptually uninviting and tedious to read.

For example, having reported that the first American reviews of Auden's poetry—by Morton Zabel, Dudley Fitts, Henry Bamford Parkes and John Gould Fletcher—were generally superficial, and ambivalent towards Auden's Marxism, Mazzaro observes that in 1934 James Burnham argued for the first time that Auden must be taken seriously—and in the context of both Marxist and psychoanalytic theory. In the wake of this review, Mazzaro continues,

[1] POSTMODERN AMERICAN POETRY, by *Jerome Mazzaro*. University of Illinois Press. $13.50.

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> Reviewers generally are intrigued enough by the poet to have read beforehand C. Day Lewis's remarks in *A Hope for Poetry* (1934). They cite his assurances of the poetry's politics and psychology as well as of the poet's literary forebears, Hopkins, Wilfred Owen, and Eliot. "Yeats, the last in the aristocratic tradition of poets, remains," according to Day Lewis, "the most admired of living writers: none of us can touch his later work, and it is too personal in idiom, too insulated to allow an easy communication of its powers." By this date, too, Auden's stature is such that A. J. M. Smith in "Old Games, New Rules" (1935) can begin: "What remains to be said about the poetry of W. H. Auden?"; and, in a letter to the young Theodore Roethke, Rolfe Humphries can propose the English poet as a model for solving some of the roughnesses of Roethke's style. (p. 8)

These quotations (especially the one which is about Yeats, not Auden) do not particularly support Mazzaro's claim that critical notice took an important turn after Burnham's review, nor do they shed light on what we as readers care most about: Auden's *poetry*.

The second limitation, and this is more serious, is that Mazzaro does not synthesize this material with clearly delineated arguments. The import of his thesis, its profounder consequences and its elaboration in detail, must be surmised by the reader on insufficient grounds.

Mazzaro's leading conceptual problem is that he has cast his net too broadly. Though he constantly invokes Jarrell's triumvirate "Darwin, Marx, Freud & Co.," truly the dominant figure here is Freud. All the references to Marx in his index refer to Auden's (British!) Marxist phase, and the passing references to Darwin in the chapters on Plath and Bishop are strained and arbitrary. To my mind, the most coherent plan of attack for this book would have been to analyze the influence of, and reaction to, Freudian theory, in the poetry of Auden, Jarrell, Lowell, Roethke, Berryman and (perhaps) Plath. A book so organized might do for American poetry what Donald Davie's excellent *Thomas Hardy and British Poetry* has done for poetry of roughly the same period in Britain.

The thesis of Davie's book, clearly stated and adumbrated in careful readings of the poetry of Hardy, and of Larkin and his generation, is worth recalling here, for it also locates by opposition what might have been Mazzaro's argument. These poets, living in one of the most industrialized landscapes on earth, confronted the ascendancy of science and technology, and tried to locate the claims of life and art beside them.

According to Davie, Hardy embraced the claims of technology much as Wordsworth did in an extraordinary passage in the Preface to *Lyrical Ballads* (1802 edition) where he claimed,

> If the labors of men of science should ever create any material revolution, direct or indirect, in our condition, and in the impressions which we habitually receive, the poet will sleep then no more than at present . . . If the time should come when what is now called science, thus familiarized to men, shall be ready to put on, as it were, a form of flesh and blood, the poet will lend his divine spirit to aid the transfiguration,

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> and will welcome the being thus produced, as a dear and genuine inmate of the household of man.

Hardy, as to an increasing degree those after him, was aware of the price to be paid for the industrial and technological revolutions; but Davie argues that he, seeing himself as a technician (of poetry) among other technicians, relinquished his responsibility to transform reality radically—politically, socially or through some conceptual revision.

Eliot, Pound, Valéry, Claudel, and Yeats reacted against the modern landscape by trying to establish an imaginative alternative. Hardy's followers on the other hand, as Davie represents them, kept their vision trained on quotidian reality, but with a greater sense of themselves as political and moral agents. (Certainly the best British critics, Davie, Raymond Williams, Leavis, never pass judgment without taking this kind of agency into account.)

Just as Marxism, in a form so pervasive and diffuse that it is rarely made explicit or called into question, is characteristic of British literary culture, so, Davie observes quite correctly, Freudianism is characteristic of American. This explains why Mazzaro might profitably have restricted his attention to Freud, but itself in turn requires explanation. The issue is important and disturbing. Mazzaro's *Rezeptionsgeschichte* of Auden's poetry offers pieces of what might constitute its treatment, but fails to put them together.

Though I do not know in detail what a book which traced the lines of influence from Freud to the postmodernist poets would look like, I can suggest with some assurance what basic conditions it would have to meet and what questions it should address. First of all it should be based on a serious study of Freud (there is not much evidence that Mazzaro has read more than *The Interpretation of Dreams* and *Civilization and its Discontents*) and of the poet's *poetry*. For poets put whatever wisdom they have in their poetry and also exhibit the limitations of their vision there. Mazzaro spends so much time on what critics had to say about the poems and Freud, and, less frequently, on what the poets had to say about their poems and Freud, that, using other people's words, he operates always at second and third remove, and cannot come to the heart of the matter.

The poets Mazzaro treats confronted, indeed were plagued by, certain questions. What kind of poetry is possible in this age, where differentiation has undone the old unities at all levels, and a growing sense of the historical dimensions of reality forces us to regard the elements of culture as invented, not given, and therefore subject to question? What kind of self, morality, truth, social structure, relation to nature and the past, is possible now? What is the role of poetry in clarifying or even constructing such selves, moralities, truths, societies, relations? Characteristically, these poets took up the question of self-identity first, and then worked towards the other questions, when they did, from that one; and Freud was their *éminence grise*.

Freud must be for these poets a terribly ambiguous figure. For although he was one of the primary shapers of modernity, he denied the claims of poetry to truth. The poet, on Freud's account, is luckier than the

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rest of us in that he can turn his private day-dreams into works which are pleasing to himself and his audience, and is therefore doubly rewarded in his fantasizing. But the matter of his art is wish, not reality. Though the positive science of psychoanalysis can use art works as data—as it uses dreams—to say something true about the inner life of the artist, art as such has no claim upon truth, which is the correspondence of interior to exterior reality.

One way in which these poets come to terms with Freud is to reject (consciously? unconsciously?) his estimation of the poet's function, and to appropriate for themselves activities which on Freud's account are the sole privilege of the scientist. Somehow, surprisingly, the poet becomes both analyst and analysand, and the writing of poems is given a place, almost pride of place, in the process of analysis. This reversal constitutes an interesting subversion of Freud's positivist tenets, for now the self may be constructed as well as discovered, and the language appropriate to analysis may be inherently figurative (not just the literal dressing-down of manifest to latent content), where figures are vehicles of discovery, and ambiguity is richness, not just conflation. Mazzaro touches on this kind of poetic take-over at the end of his chapter on Berryman.

Davie suggests that it was the very (un-modern, un-contingent) timelessness of the Oedipal drama which appealed to American poets; that is, Freud provided them not only with means for grappling with the dilemma of the age, but also with an avenue of escape from it. For, rather than developing a historically-located, socially-conscious vision of reality as their British counterparts did, so many of them turned inwards on themselves, constructing myths out of the narrative of their own life, where the poet is exemplary sufferer. Insofar as for these poets act became merely interior reenactment, I would say that their lives and poetry did not develop—from which we should take warning.

This is certainly the indictment which, justly or unjustly, Jarrell leveled against Auden. The chapter on Auden in Mazzaro's book is especially disappointing, since without some firm account of Auden's ways of appropriating Freud to set the stage, subsequent chapters must falter; none of the other poets could read Freud without thinking of Auden.

The following stanzas from "In Memory of Sigmund Freud," which Mazzaro never discusses, can serve as an indication of the questions I wish had been asked and answered in that opening chapter.

> He wasn't clever at all: he merely told
> the unhappy Present to recite the Past
> like a poetry lesson till sooner
> or later it faltered at the line where
>
> long ago the accusations had begun;
> and suddenly knew by whom it had been judged,
> how rich life had been and how silly,
> and was life-forgiven and more humble;

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able to approach the Future as a friend
without a wardrobe of excuses, without
a set mask of rectitude or an
embarrassing over-familiar gesture.

How and why did Auden make of Freud what he did? Here Auden calls analysis the recitation of a poetry lesson, and praises Freud's sense of history, ignoring his positivist tendencies to freeze the structure of human nature apart from the stream of time and consciousness. He is also presented as a not particularly original moralist who taught that, in order to choose properly, we must rid ourselves of our delusions. Did Auden deepen Freud's thought, whether or not in ways which Freud would have approved, or truncate it, making it less than it was? Did the playing of himself so often against Freud prove salutary for Auden's poetry or his life? These are questions which must engage any serious reader of Auden's work. A more general version of these questions—under what circumstances should poetry be read in the light of a discursively structured *Wissenschaft*, and, when does theory require poetry for its development—ought to have been addressed by Mazzaro in his Preface. For this conjunction cannot be taken for granted.

Helen Vendler's *Part of Nature, Part of Us*,[2] a collection of book reviews and essays on modern American poets, testifies to the profound respect and comprehension she has given to the poetry of the writers she considers. If we go to poetry for illumination, perspective, playfulness, solace, then the task of the critic is to lead us into it and out again: poem, oeuvre, line of inheritance, world. Because it is a collection of essays written for a variety of occasions, this book cannot be the kind of thesis-book which Davie wrote and which Mazzaro ought to have written. However, I would like to suggest in passing that such a treatment of American poets is now well within Vendler's powers, and I for one would read it with the greatest interest.

Not surprisingly, since Vendler has written extensively on Wallace Stevens, her opening essays on Stevens are most of a piece, evidence of a coherent conception of Stevens' work as a whole. It is an internal reading; though one is grateful for the absence of that scaffolding of other critics' remarks, these essays contain little mention of what Stevens' relations were with his contemporaries, poets and critics, or even the life of American society. No doubt Stevens, withdrawn and isolated as he was, lent himself to this kind of treatment, but, like Valéry, his very abstraction and frozen reticence were also ingredients in the failure of his life and his poetry. Vendler would probably disagree with this judgment, since she regards his poetry as a triumph over the bitter constraints of his life:

> Steven's unwillingness to abandon either of his two incompatible truths—the truth of desire and the truth of the failure of desire—led to a great amplitude of human vision not granted to those who live more comfortably in body and soul . . . (p. 58)

[2] PART OF NATURE, PART OF US, by *Helen Vendler*. Harvard University Press. $15.00.

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Most of these essays are a pleasure to read, but I particularly enjoyed the ones on Moore (where the fact that she was a biology major at Bryn Mawr is given its proper significance), Lowell (a sympathetic reading of a difficult life), Rich (a much-needed, comprehensive and yet sometimes critical apology), and Dave Smith (a fine example of how to display the powers of a young poet to the public). Their cardinal virtues are an intelligent, witty, sometimes brilliant and only rarely mannered prose style; liberal quotations from the poems, well-chosen and well-analyzed; ideas clearly formulated and set in perspicuous arguments; and, from time to time, passages of real human wisdom.

For example, the review of Elizabeth Bishop's *Geography III* (which also treats *Questions of Travel*), sent this reader for the first time to Bishop's collected works for sustained study and pleasure, just what good criticism is supposed to do. Vendler uses two polar terms—the domestic and the strange, *heimlich* and *unheimlich*—to structure and exhibit the central concerns of both books. These terms exchange their senses, as foreign places are taken to heart through travel, and as death, or the poet's vision which alienates and transforms, reveal that "the strange can occur even in the bosom of the familiar, even, most unnervingly, at the domestic hearth." The sestina "September rain falls on the house," "Filling Station" and "First Death in Nova Scotia," all difficult poems, are unlocked by this double key. Where Freud concludes that it is "something repressed that recurs" which estranges the familiar, Bishop shows it is more complex than that. The catalyst is death, first of all, and then that distanced perspective on the child's world of the adult who knows how many roads lead from home, since a home is established only in the dangerous tension between here and there. So children must *learn* to be at home, precisely by confronting the ways in which Death and Elsewhere impinge on their haven.

Bishop does this! Where so many post-modernist poets tried and then, weeping, self-pitying, self-regarding, collapsed back into a kind of spiritual trundle-bed under the big bed, tucked into illusory safety. "Crusoe in England" shows that our process of appropriating the great world is a conferment of meaning, which is real but precarious and corruptible; "The Moose" embodies the endless strangeness of nature lying outside the familiar, which carries us beyond ourselves all our life precisely because it is inexhaustible, and which ultimately proves to be not only mysterious but comforting. Freud would add that this strangeness is also in us, since the psychical is the unconscious, and consciousness only a quality of the psychical. No wonder none of us now can afford to dispense with Freud, who, Auden observed,

> . . . would have us remember most of all
> to be enthusiastic over the night.
> not only for the sense of wonder
> it alone has to offer, but also
>
> because it needs our love. With large sad eyes

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its delectable creatures look up and beg
us dumbly to ask them to follow:
they are exiles who long for the future

that lies in our power . . .

Both Mazzaro and Vendler leave unexplained the pervasive sense of failure in postmodernist poetry and, indeed, its failure as a whole. Mazzaro forgets the partially-formulated thesis of his "Preface" by the end of his commentary on Berryman, where he states that Berryman's masking in *The Dream Songs* is a dissolution of all the characters of Henry, "resolved appropriately into silence," a oneness which is death. "As in Rilke and Roethke, this resolution is along the lines of a connaturality: one merges with what one contemplates because at a deep level there is an essential unity of all existence." Out of historical place, out of time. This, to my mind, is tantamount to admitting the failure of these poets to engage the complex historicity of the modern era, a retreat into a childish or tribal dream of unity no longer possible, which echoes the human failure of their lives. Vendler, on the other hand, is simply too often a writer of appreciations, avoiding, except in a few instances, aggressively negative criticism.

Is there a unity which the modern poet can invoke, a version of adult integrity which will serve us? It is hard to say. Yves Bonnefoy, in his admirable manifesto, "L'acte et le lieu de la poésie," suggests that what remains to the poet, what in fact is necessary to us all as moral agents committed to finding grounds for hope in the often desperate conditions of this world, is a fugitive vision of transcendence, no sooner glimpsed than departed. As Baudelaire in "Le Cygne" captured the swan, the phthisic negress, and Paris itself in their transient particularity, so we must learn that to see things in the shadow of death is to apprehend what makes them worthy of love, and real.

> Ne suffisait-il pas d'apercevoir, au flanc de quelque montagne, une vitre au soleil du soir?

Qualifying Bonnefoy's insight, Davie and the British poets would remind us that such a transfiguring moment draws its significance also from sequences of acts and events in history; and that love, which is the fire on the windowpane, comes to its full powers only by growing slowly and painfully through time.

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WILLIAM H. PRITCHARD

Blackmur's Last Song

> A week ago as I was walking through a street, little frequented, in the suburbs of this city, I was suddenly conscious of a rushing noise behind me, and before I knew what was the matter, I was struck violently by a soft substance on the back of the head, and flung to the ground so quickly that I did not even make an effort to save myself. I was somewhat stunned and a good deal hurt, but I jumped up mechanically, with the desire one always has to escape ridicule and appear as though one's internal anguish were a pleasure and quite the sort of thing one likes. Bewildered by the blow from behind and the equally severe fall; covered with sand from beard to boots; my gloves torn; one finger flayed; two others nearly dislocated, and a painful swelling raised over my knee, I staggered to my hat, and picked it up. Perhaps in my foggy condition I should have hurried on without stopping to search the cause of my disaster, had the cause not been too evident. There, on the ground half a rod in front, flapping painfully, and gazing at me with eyes to the full as amazed and bewildered as my own, was a huge, white, tame goose.

Although literary people can quote "Leda and the Swan" at the drop of a shuddering blow (the great wings beating still), few of them are familiar with Henry Adams and the Goose. Which is a pity since, as Adams went on to note in this letter of 1869 to Charles Milnes Gaskell, the event will have, he is convinced, "some mysterious and portentous connection with my future fate." He invites Gaskell to compose some Latin verses describing how he, Adams, met his end

> not like the poetic bird, by one of my own feathers, but by the entire carcass of the beast whose feathers had made my wings. Daedalus was nothing in comparison. He melted at the rays of the sun. But I was floored by the stupidest, dirtiest and coarsest of domestic dung-hill fowl.

Since as far as one knows, Gaskell didn't come through with the requested verses, we might at least supply a title to the episode: Historian Forcibly Goosed, or The Sum and Term of Education. And I would guess that despite the sore knee and flayed finger, that goose's visitation made the historian's day. Aside from the obvious pleasure and pains Adams has taken in writing it up for his friend Gaskell, there must have been a sense of confirmation: here, once more, an unimaginable, unforeseen force by which defenseless man was floored. The event could be sad, tragic even; but when one considers that the huge goose was at least as bewildered as Adams, then one smiles, or grimaces, and proceeds to rise again, to go about one's business with, it may be, renewed energies.

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I discovered the goose only while reading Adams' letters this past summer, under the stimulus of R. P. Blackmur's posthumously published book about him.[1] But the combination of playfulness and portentousness, of mock heroic stylishness, was memorably impressed on me thirty years ago when as a college sophomore I was introduced to *The Education of Henry Adams.* Much of it, not surprisingly, went over my head; but I knew that I'd never encountered anything like it before. In its magnificent first chapter ("Quincy") we are told that "The New England light is glare, and the atmosphere harshens color. The boy was a full man before he ever knew what was meant by atmosphere"; and that "After a January blizzard, the boy who could look with pleasure into the violent snow-glare of the cold white sunshine, with its intense light and shade, scarcely knew what was meant by tone. He could reach it only by education." That atmosphere, that tone, is what the *Education* creates superbly and continuingly; the elegiac and the humorous wonderfully mixed; portent nudged into something other than the merely portentous.

Now if there is any critic of literature in this century whose writing is full of atmosphere and tone, it is Richard Blackmur. When, especially in his essays on modern poets—Eliot, Crane, Lawrence, Pound, Stevens, Cummings—that atmosphere provided a medium in which the words on the page were studied and their music evoked, the result was breathtaking and Blackmur's achievement beyond praise. When, more frequently in his later work from the postwar 1940s and '50s, he became speculative and his essays began to bear titles like "Between the Numen and the Moha," atmosphere became all-pervasive and stifling, the tone sometimes too hushed and elevated for its prose's own good. Without trying to sound superior to a superior intelligence, I think it right to have mixed feelings about (in a favorite word of his) Blackmur's "ad-libbing," his vamping till the ready which never comes. At any rate all Blackmur's readers knew that for years he had been at work on Henry Adams, and that the long book he was writing would provide the sacred word by interpreting Adams with a sympathy and inwardness beyond the reach of ordinary critics. The book never appeared; but now, fifteen years after Blackmur's death, an edited version of it has given us as much as we had any right to expect. Gratitude to the editor and the publisher must be one's first word.

In his foreword to the book, Denis Donoghue suggests that perhaps Blackmur's failure to complete it might have had something to do with the fact that his mind worked best in the twenty-five page essay format (those essays from the 1930s on poets), and that since the only way to go at Adams was through one foray (Adams would say "failure") after another, there was no true sense in which the book could be completed. This seems to me likely, but I am less convinced by another remark Donoghue makes in the course of describing Blackmur's characteristic critical operation as "a supplication of texts": "In supplication you create the thing you see . . . you respond to one form of energy, enhancing it with your

[1] HENRY ADAMS, by *R. P. Blackmur.* Edited and with an Introduction by *Veronica A. Makowsky.* Foreword by *Denis Donoghue.* Harcourt Brace Jovanovich. $19.95.

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own," says Donoghue. But supplication means presenting a humble petition, with religious overtones to the fore, and in this sense Blackmur didn't "supplicate" the poetry of Lawrence or Hart Crane or Stevens; he analyzed its use of language, compared it to other uses, and made a judgment (sometimes an adverse one) about the result. In other words, he did criticism. With Henry Adams, to whom he devoted so much of his energies and with whom, I think it is fair to say, he felt the deepest kinship and identification, no such critical detachment was possible. And the resulting "supplication" needs to be criticized more strongly than Donoghue is willing to do in his celebratory foreword.

Related to the matter of supplication, there is Veronica Makowsky's claim in her editorial introduction that Blackmur's "most luminous and sustained work on Adams came, as one would expect, during the late 1940's and early 1950's, when Blackmur—at the height of his powers—turned his attention to the final and most fruitful decades of Adams' life." The result of that attention makes up by far the bulk of this book: "The Virgin and the Dynamo" is a 250-page explication of the *Education* and of *Mont-St-Michel and Chartres*, while "King Richard's Prison Song" is a 60-page portrait of Adams' last years. Yet I would argue that Blackmur reached the height of his powers in his earlier essays published in *The Double Agent* (1935) and *The Expense of Greatness* (1940), that he never wrote anything as fine thereafter, and that his writing on Adams did not gain in strength and comprehensibility the more he did of it. In support of this claim that his best pieces of writing about Adams were done early on: "The Expense of Greatness: Three Emphases on Henry Adams" was published in 1936 and has been chosen by the editor to lead off this volume; while "King Richard's Prison Song," with which the volume concludes and which the editor speaks of as a product of late 1940s–1950s "mature" Blackmur, first appeared, in a shortened but essentially the same version, as "Henry Adams: Three Late Moments" in the *Kenyon Review* in 1940. In other words I don't think it unfair to say that Blackmur's best writing about Adams was done in the 1930s, at the time when he was turning out his other classic essays. What happened later on, and not perhaps for the best, was elaboration and extension, the further supplication which makes the long central essay "The Virgin and the Dynamo" an unsatisfactory, even at times a tedious reading experience.

As Blackmur saw it in the first chapter of this long essay, with reference to the *Education* his job was

> deliberately to detach and rehearse the symbolic elements in the effort to catch the echo. At the right point an analogous exploration of the *Chartres* must be made; and finally, if possible, the symbolic values of the two books must be compared and joined and encouraged to work upon each other, so that we may feel them, however complex and disparate in structure, as a single echo, fading and fulling in our own minds.

Already here there seems to be a bit of incantation, the Pateresque single echo, alliteratively "fading and fulling" [sic?] in the mind, as if something

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more, and more delicate were to be attempted here than in mere ordinary criticism made up of comparison and analysis. In fact when Blackmur attempts to "catch the echo" by rehearsing certain symbolic elements in the *Education*, the rehearsal often turns out to be more elusive, harder to hear correctly, than was the tune itself. For example, perhaps the most vivid and amusing chapters in the book are the ones describing Adams' diplomatic and social life as assistant secretary to Charles Francis Adams' ministry to England during the Civil War. One of these chapters, "The Battle of the Rams," consists of the most complicated diplomatic maneuvers involving Palmerston, Lord Russell, Gladstone, and the American statesmen who were trying to keep England neutral during the conflict. Each time I read "The Battle of the Rams" I resolve to follow the maneuverings, tease out the connective thread which renders them intelligible in Adams' narrative. Each time I fail, to the point where I've persuaded myself that this is what Adams wants me to do, and that in diplomacy your opponents may have even less policy, be more confused and unintelligible in their actions, than you yourself are. But consider the following sentences by Blackmur, reflecting on what "he" (Adams) learned from this experience:

> The more he reflected on what they taught, the clearer it seemed that they taught the limitations and relative intensities of their different types of character as they pressed, or were pressed by, the mass of government in motion. Though government is set up of laws not men, men still sit at the center and filter laws through their personality. So it is also true that men must filter their words through the acts to which they are impelled by laws and interests. The filters alter the force and value of the laws without altering either the intent of the laws or the interests. Thus there is conflict and contradiction which require treatment, either by self-deception or readjustment, by the men who experience them, in order to make action possible. Action emphasizes the values actually at work, with expense to the consistency of the principles which are supposed to guide the action. Action is a constant revelation of the inadequacy of principle to a given situation without necessarily affecting the adequacy of principle to all situations. The lesson is simple in the abstract but aggravating in the concrete instance.

Something is wrong with this writing. It is surely less vivid, more toneless, than anything in the chapter from Adams. It formulates, painstakingly and without Adams' playful, dramatic sense of things, a moral insight which one can't deny the truth of (if one understands it) but which seems remote from, even irrelevant to the experience of reading Henry Adams. Do I need to be told this? one asks, unconvinced that it's a true "echo" of the *Education*.

Often Blackmur begins his sentences the way Adams begins them, with a "To Adams," say, and the result is eerily like and unlike the original: "To Adams the English mind of the 'sixties, and all its motives, seemed

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an eccentric version of the American mind. It either worked off center or its center was not located where the American center was and had other attractive forces unknown to Americans—especially to Americans from Quincy." Now Chapter XII of the *Education*, "Eccentricity," says in its first paragraph that "The English mind was one-sided, eccentric, systematically unsystematic, and logically illogical. The less one knew of it, the better." It would be a poor thing to charge Blackmur with the Heresy of Paraphrase, and admittedly he is not attempting to render one particular sentence. But I think that his sentence is less "eccentric" than Adams', less playful—even with the flourish at the end about Americans from Quincy—and that it loses rather than catches the echo. To sound *almost* like Adams may be more dangerous than not sounding like him at all.

Blackmur says that the full meaning of Adams' symbols is elusive, and (with regard to the recurrent *Pteraspis*—the sturgeon-like first vertebrate who appears in the Darwinism chapter of the *Education* and keeps cropping up later on) even admits that "there is a little plain nonsense in them too, a little of *hoc est corpus* turned hocus pocus." Recognizing that Adams cultivates such effects is a step in the right direction, certainly as far as reading the *Education* is concerned. But when Blackmur comes to consider the recurrence of *Pteraspis* late in the book (after Adams has been to the Chicago Exhibition and the South Seas) to illustrate "what survives every moral improvement . . . in society," he expatiates in this manner:

> There had been an interlude of shark education in the South Seas, for there the shark was divine, and Adams had become a member of the royal, or Salmon, family, whose source of power was in that divinity. And there, too, the women had measured like Venus, and Adams had made himself an image that brought the Greeks on an argosy there. *Pteraspis* indeed! Venus too! His exile had been in a strange land, in which numerical sequences, the shark, and Venus came to have a relation. Failing Nirvana in Japan (though not giving up) he had found the shark-Venus in Tahiti, and had there changed his name in deepening his service. Thus his nieces became *Salmonidae*, and Rodin's *Psyche*, when transplanted to the Beverly Woods, became Fishy. On the edges of life Pteraspis was divine energy: in its center, brute.

Even if one has just reread the *Education* this piece of hocus pocus leaves one baffled and irritated. At such a point it is good to pick up Yvor Winters' chapter on Adams in *The Anatomy of Nonsense* where Winters says, with regard to Adams on geology, "His procedure is to be witty rather than intelligent, and, having established a state of confusion for the sake of the wit, to deduce his spiritual suffering from it . . . The result is a certain iridescence of emotional surface but nothing precisely of sanity." If Winters could say this about Adams, what would he have said about the above paragraph in which Blackmur attempts to do his subject one better? Again, with reference to Adams' effort to distinguish kinds of eccen-

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tricity in Whistler and John LaFarge, Blackmur makes distinctions in an elliptical way that makes Adams seem clear by comparison:

> LaFarge's eccentricity was of perception, Whistler's of temper, and Adams's, perhaps, of reason that expressed some admixture of temper and perception. LaFarge in glass ran to insubordination, Whistler in life ran to the commonplace, Adams in thought to principle, to summarized intelligence. LaFarge left out wholeness, Whistler actual perception, Adams—did not know what he left out . . .

Hocus pocus: now you see it now you don't.

A final example of Blackmur making things even harder than they are in the original comes in his discussion of the "movement" of five late chapters in the *Education* beginning with "The Dynamo and the Virgin." Surely these chapters are difficult of access and, for me at least, represent that part of the book with which I'm least satisfied. But Blackmur tells me this about them:

> The movement of the five chapters is thus continuous—as if circular—along the three sides of a triangle, with each angle representing the juncture of two contrasted conceptions of force, the Dynamo and the Virgin, the human machine and its energies, and lastly the human animal and his own force, where at the limit of the third leg of the triangle the end is identified with the beginning of the motion. The force of thought, the trope of Psyche, is itself the outside force, like the Dynamo or the Virgin, and as occult as either. But it is an identity only by dialectic, by reversal, by experience; and the question is how to translate an ambiguity into an ambivalence.

In my judgment he is pretending to hear things that just aren't there in the music; at least any reader who might be said to experience "movement" in such terms would be a very ideal type indeed, not necessarily to be encouraged.

But my chief sticking-point with Blackmur's Adams is not his analysis of the *Education*—overwrought as I think it often is—but with his conviction that *Mont-St-Michel and Chartres* is Adams' "chief imaginative pilgrimage" (the editor, Veronica Makowsky, also regards it as a "masterpiece") and that "Those who complain that he romanticizes a fantastic or an eccentric impulse have not thought from what depths that impulse came, nor how ancient and universal its human history is . . . " Blackmur must be speaking about the likes of myself who find *Chartres* precious and longwinded and full of, yes, mariolatry, of a piece with Adams' generally embarrassing reverence for Woman. For Blackmur, it represents "The Full Return" (as the chapter is titled) and the culmination of a life's work. But would it be perverse to suggest instead that the great work of Adams' life had already been done; that, though the *Education* is a magnificent book and the one of Adams' which will continue to be read, his

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unread masterpiece is the nine volume *History of the United States during the Administrations of Jefferson and Madison*, a book I urge you, reader, to devote next summer to. In this great history Adams' expressive powers are fully displayed, his language is wholly adequate to what he wants to say, his irony and humor are strong and unsoured. It is without archness or whimsicality—nothing in it ever feels forced. And perhaps the reason why Blackmur neglects it in favor of the later Adams is that it is all *there* on the surface; no need then for the critic to "supplicate," or to "rehearse the symbolic element in an effort to catch the echo," since it is the historian's voice, not the echo, to which we attend.[2]

What will turn out, I suspect, to be the section of Blackmur's book which will be returned to (aside from the reprinted "Expense of Greatness" essay) is "King Richard's Prison Song," his loving and luminous (a favorite Blackmurian word, justly applied to his writing here) portrait of Henry Adams' old age.[3] Here we are served with, among much else, wonderful comparisons between Adams and Henry James, or a brilliant juxtaposition of Henry Adams with his brother Charles Francis about whom Henry would think (when he saw Charles, nearing eighty, still riding his horse daily) "There goes my 'idjut' brother Charles!" Or we hear of Adams, after his stroke, drinking only champagne and taking it by the pint in a single gulp since "the full mouth was the only way to get the taste of all of it all at once." Finally there are a couple of extraordinary pages in which Blackmur improvises on a paragraph from Mrs. Winthrop Chanler's *Roman Spring* which describes "Uncle Henry" alone in his library with Gabrielle Chanler, one of his "junior nieces": "The small old man nearing eighty, in dark clothes, with white beard and shirt, and the young girl of sixteen, sitting opposite each other in the low, deep maroon leather chairs . . . " Blackmur continues to hover, Jamesianly, over the scene and eventually concludes with the following sentences:

> No wonder the old man Adams, coming back, as we put it, to himself—to the loneliness which we feel as echo—should have found safety in the conviction that what was shared was not understood—it was beyond that—and have found comfort in the assurance that his words could no

[2] The best study of the *History*, recently published, is William Dusinberre's *Henry Adams: The Myth of Failure* (Univ. Press of Virginia, 1980). An English historian, Professor Dusinberre devotes a long chapter ("History as Art") to Adams' style, identifying and admiring its salient features; "His precision of vocabulary, vividness of imagery, extravagance of syntax, fertility in inventing synonyms and in exploiting the resources of iteration; capacity to generalize, courage to trust the reader's power of comprehension; passionate engagement in past politics, yet discretion in expressing his own judgments; sophistication in proposing contrary points of view for the reader's consideration—these and other qualities conjoin to make Adams's prose something exceptional . . . " Dusinberre goes on to compare the *History* with the great works of Gibbon and Macaulay.

[3] John Quincy Adams had been much taken with a song from André Grétey's opera, *Richard Coeur-de-lion*, which begins "O Richard! O, mon Roi!/L'univers t'abandonne." Henry Adams quotes it in *Chartres* and devoted much, in his later years, to studying and paraphrasing it. Is it fanciful to guess that Richard Blackmur was also extremely moved by the earlier Richard's prison song?

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> more be quoted than the look on his face. Who would wish, really, experience to be otherwise than fleeting? It is enough ever afterward to be haunted.

It is for such fleeting moments that we will keep reading Richard Blackmur, and if this monument, this last song to Henry Adams is not his "masterpiece," we can respect the depths from which the impulse behind such writing must have come, and even feel the loneliness and the hauntedness as echo.

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DANA GIOIA

Poetry Chronicle

AFTER TWENTY-FIVE YEARS OF PROSPEROUS COLLABORATION with the Academy, poets are beginning to leave for "parts unknown." In 1955, 1965, or even 1975 whenever the inevitable question was raised "Where are the best young British and American poets?", the inevitable answer was, "teaching in the universities." No one found the response especially satisfactory, but it was indisputably true. Now in 1980 the situation of the poet is no longer as clear or simple. Certainly many of the best young poets still support themselves as teachers of English or Creative Writing, but increasingly many talented young poets are entering the most unexpected professions. The books under review here present many examples of this new development. From the forty or so new books of poetry I read in preparation for this chronicle, the dozen which seemed accomplished and interesting enough to review were written by a cattle farmer, a distinguished novelist, a stock broker, an insurance underwriter, a Russian *emigré*, a public relations man, a dog and horse trainer, three poets-in-residence (two of whom seem currently unemployed), and only one Professor of English. Certainly the notorious shortage of new teaching jobs alone cannot explain this diaspora of talent. Something profoundly different is happening in the way poets are managing their careers. But perhaps this change is nothing more than a return to normality after three decades of uneasy *rapprochement*. Of a list of ten major American poets born eighty to one hundred years ago (Stevens, Williams, Eliot, Crane, Frost, Pound, Robinson, Cummings, Ransom), only one was a full-time academic. One should not draw too many conclusions from such a small sample, but it is interesting to note for future reference.

When Joseph Brodsky's *Selected Poems* were published in 1973, I admired his work for its energy and imagination but still found the volume difficult to read at long stretches. At times the book seemed like a miscellany containing too many poems arranged too loosely. George Kline's translations, although quite good in some ways, also had an uncanny knack of suggesting how much the reader was missing of the original. I was glad to have this generous selection of Brodsky's poetry, but I feared that his full distinction as a poet would remain inaccessible to anyone who did not know Russian. Now Brodsky's new collection, *A Part of Speech*,[1] suddenly changes this state of affairs. This well-focused, excellently translated volume makes him for the first time fully accessible in English.

Brodsky has organized the poems in *A Part of Speech* with great care. The book is divided into two sections corresponding ironically to an old and a new testament appropriately linked by prophecies and echoes. The

[1] A PART OF SPEECH, by *Joseph Brodsky*. Farrar, Straus & Giroux. $12.95.

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first section, entitled "A Song to No Music," consists of seventeen poems skillfully chosen from all the work Brodsky wrote during the last years he was in the Soviet Union. These poems reveal how much he was an emotional exile in his homeland before he became a political exile abroad. Brodsky repeatedly strikes an Ovidian note of sadness and estrangement, sometimes even modulating into horror—as in this disturbing sonnet which forms a section of his "Lithuanian Divertissement," deftly translated by Alan Myers:

> Sleeplessness. Part of a woman. A glass
> replete with reptiles all straining to get out.
> The day's long madness has drained across
> the cerebellum into the occiput,
> forming a pool; one movement and the slush
> will feel as if someone, in that icy blot,
> has dipped a sharpened quill that, after a pause,
> deliberately traces the verb "hate"
> in oscillating scribbles to reverse
> the brain wave pattern. Something lipsticked stuffs
> the ear with lacerating lengthy words,
> like running fingers through a hairdo stiff
> with lice. Alone and naked in your sack,
> you lie there fallen from the Zodiac.

The second section of the book, which gives *A Part of Speech* its title, consists of poems Brodsky has written in exile. Although written in a variety of techniques from the perspective of half a dozen different countries, these new poems are unified by their author's bleak vision of himself as a man without family or home, without destination or future. Brodsky is not a political poet, and yet by force of circumstance his work has acquired a deep political dimension. Sometimes the politics are overt as in the poems where he assumes a Roman identity and comments on the state of the Empire. Here he adopts many elements from two of his masters, Auden and Cavafy—most notably their ability to deal openly with politics without ever succumbing to its temptations to be doctrinaire. More often Brodsky uses politics as just one more part of life, as inescapable as the weather, in the background of his intensely personal poems. For Brodsky is at his finest when he writes most personally. Even his private fears and fantasies transform themselves into powerful poetry. For example, towards the end of his long title sequence, Brodsky thinks about the Russian word for "the future"—which resembles the word for "rodents"—and he has a frightening vision of his own future. In another poet this conceit might have seemed awkward, but with Brodsky the effect is strong and immediate. I quote the entire section in Brodsky's own surprisingly rich and fluent translation:

> . . . and when 'the future' is uttered, swarms of mice
> rush out of the Russian language and gnaw a piece

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of ripened memory which is twice
as hole-ridden as real cheese.
After all these years it hardly matters who
or what stands in the corner, hidden by heavy drapes,
and your mind resounds not with a seraphic 'doh,'
only their rustle. Life that no one dares
to appraise, like a gift horse's mouth,
bares its teeth in a grin at each
encounter. What gets left of a man amounts
to a part. To his spoken part. To a part of speech.

When many writers collaborate on translating the work of a single poet, the results are usually disastrous. Each translator brings something slightly different to the poems, and the reader of the final collection often finds so little consistency of voice, tone, diction, and style, that the central poet is lost like the harmony in an orchestra where every player is slightly out of tune. *A Part of Speech* is a notable exception to this rule. Brodsky has been fortunate to find or choose a group of translators capable of hitting common notes, and one identifiable voice is heard behind all the poems, even in Anthony Hecht's marvellous translation of "Lagoon" where one can also hear Hecht's own unmistakable voice. Another superb set of translations are contributed by Howard Moss, which are so good I find it hard to imagine that the Russian originals are any better. There is also an elegy for Robert Lowell which Brodsky has written in English. No one any longer has an excuse not to read Brodsky.

For those who sat through the *cinéma noir* of Ted Hughes's long poem, *Gaudete* (1977), his new collection, *Moortown*,[2] will come as a welcome relief. Once again Hughes has returned to the source of his strength as a poet, the English countryside. The only problem is that he does not stay there long enough but soon wanders off into one or another mythic landscape where the resulting poems quickly become repetitive and facile. Yet the weak sections of *Moortown* do not distract from the book's better poems because the volume is actually a collection of four distinct sections, written (as far as I can tell from Harper & Row's scanty copyright information) over a period of about ten years. Of these sections the strongest is most certainly the title sequence which stands as one of the best things Hughes has ever written. I have always resisted the violent, sanguinary side of Hughes's imagination. In a way more typical of filmmakers like Peckinpah or De Palma than of a poet, Hughes uses sex and violence excessively in his work as a way to shock his readers into attention. The title sequence, "Moortown," is no exception to this rule. It contains enough blood, shit, piss, copulation, and afterbirth to satisfy the most scatalogically-minded twelve-year-old. And yet it is impossible to deny the cumulative power of the poems. Sex and violence are authentic parts of life, and these are the parts of experience that have exerted a lasting fascination on Hughes.

"Moortown" is a series of poems about a beef and sheep farm in Devon

[2] MOORTOWN, by *Ted Hughes*. Harper & Row. $10.95.

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that Hughes worked with his late father-in-law, Jack Orchard. The poems chronicle a year of events on the farm against the changing backdrop of Devon. Hughes has always been drawn to writing about the non-human world, and so it is not surprising that the sheep, cows, and bulls dominate the poet's attention in this sequence. Hughes involves the reader so closely in a series of dramas involving animal births, deaths, diseases, and recoveries that towards the end, when he suddenly modulates into the human drama of his father-in-law's death, the effect is overwhelmingly tragic. The documentary, descriptive nature of the poem brings out a direct, unmediated pathos that shows the gentler side of Hughes's talent:

> And that is where I remember you,
> Skull-raked with thorns, sodden, tireless,
> Hauling bedded feet free, floundering away
> To check alignments, returning, hammering the staple
> Into the soaked stake oak, a careful tattoo
> Precise to the tenth of an inch,
> Under December downpour, midafternoon
> Dark as twilight, using your life up.

Unfortunately the other three sections of *Moortown* do not measure up to the achievement of the first sequence. "Prometheus on his Crag," the second section, is Hughes at his worst—strident, abstract, and portentous. This sequence is full of passages like:

> A word
>
> A bitten-out gobbet of sun
>
> Buried behind the navel, unutterable.
> The vital, immortal wound.
>
> One nuclear syllable, bleeding silence.

The third section, "Earth Numb," is a miscellany of Hughes's recent work and includes some fine individual pieces like "Bride and Groom Lie Hidden for Three Days" and "Motorbike," but the bulk of it is mannered and strained. The last sequence, "Adam and the Sacred Nine," returns to the mythic manner of "Prometheus on his Crag" with only slightly better results. Perhaps I am deaf to the subtleties of such work, but to me it all sounds too "literary" in the worst sense of the word.

No British poet is more unlike Hughes than Kingsley Amis. Reading Hughes's *Moortown* one would never guess that more than a half dozen people live in England. Reading Amis, one cannot escape the crowds. Amis writes about England as unfortunately it is—a smudgy, post-industrial landscape. Likewise while Hughes writes about Man's Fate, Amis discusses the fates of ordinary men, and he would never adopt the ear-

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nestly prophetic tone Hughes so often assumes. He does not seek the ineffable enlightenment of private vision. Instead he bases his poems on the shared perspective of common experiences. Even when he strikes an apocalyptic note as he often does in his early work, the vision is ultimately tempered by common sense. In "The Value of Suffering" he draws an unexpected moral from the story of a nobleman who deserts his position to become a mendicant saint:

> What a shame that a regal house must founder,
> Its menials die, it favorites undergo
> Unheard-of rape, to emphasize a contrast,
> To point one thing out to one person;
> Especially since the person could have seen
> What it was all about . . .
> . . . .
> By changing places with his groom,
> By sixty seconds thought.

Collected Poems, 1944–1979[3] finally makes all of Amis' ingratiating poetry available for American readers. Looking over the volume, it is interesting to trace the author's development over those 35 years and compare him to his close friend and contemporary, Philip Larkin. In the mid-fifties Amis and Larkin must have seemed very much alike as writers. Both of them were novelists who had also written a small, carefully-crafted body of poetry. Yet by the mid-sixties it was clear that Amis had chosen the role of a minor poet while Larkin had become one of the best poets writing in English. It was not that Amis' work had declined in quality. For Amis proved Auden's *dictum* that minor poetry is as well-written as major poetry. Nor was it solely that Amis poured his genius into his novels and his talent into his verse. Instead, his development seems primarily temperamental. Amis chose the role of anti-romantic in his poetry, and he has lived with that decision and its consequences. Larkin may debunk romanticism in his poetry, but there is a visionary note underlying his best work. In contrast Amis never gives in to what used to be called "the oceanic feeling." Amis never loses a sense of distance from his subject, even when it is himself. In "A Dream of Fair Women," one of his finest poems, he explores his own sexual fantasies in a formal set piece about an imaginary bordello that makes its revelations indirectly through wit and diction rather than bald confession:

> Militant all, they fight to take my hat,
> No more as yet; the other men retire
> Insulted, gestured at;
> Each girl presses on me her share of what
> Makes up the barn-door target of desire:
> And I am a crack shot.

[3] COLLECTED POEMS 1944–1979, by *Kingsley Amis*. Viking. $10.00.

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Speech fails them, amorous, but each one's look,
Endorsed in other ways, begs me to sign
Her body's autograph book;
"Me first, Kingsley; I'm cleverest" each declares,
But no gourmet races downstairs to dine,
Nor will I race upstairs.

Amis may limit himself by dwelling within the "temperate zone" of experience, but within these latitudes he writes with memorable precision and zest. He demonstrates a lesson it is too easy to forget—that to write well about ordinary events takes extraordinary skill. And so in its peculiar way, Amis' *Collected Poems* is a necessary book, especially for those American readers who do not share his anti-romantic assumption that intelligence, wit, form, and verbal ingenuity are the essentials of poetry. Readers who find Rimbaud, Whitman, Ginsberg, and Snyder especially sympathetic, can be assured that in this sense at least Amis' work will prove a mind-expanding experience.

Reading Dick Davis' new book, *Seeing the World*,[4] confirms my impression that he is one of the two or three best young poets now writing in England. With only two thin books to his credit, Davis is already a fully realized poet. There is no mistaking one of his poems. More than any other English poet of his generation, Davis has created a distinctly personal voice, an accomplishment all the more impressive because he has chosen to work in a controlled, classical style. He never cultivates idiosyncracies, and yet one can always recognize a Davis poem by the intensity of his imagination and the deceptive simplicity of his words. In an age when American and British English are drifting farther apart, Davis is also remarkable in how fully his poems are audible to an American ear. I can hear (or at least have the illusion I can hear) everything that is going on in a Davis poem whereas I simply cannot hear the subtleties in the poems of so many of his countrymen—even highly-praised poets I have read many times, such as W. S. Graham and C. H. Sisson.

Davis' poems are usually very short and straightforward. They are highly condensed, but the sensuous surface is so smoothly polished that one never notices how much is going on until the poem is reread carefully. The platitude one hears bandied around so often in poetry textbooks—that every word must contribute to the total effect—is literally true in a Davis poem, and yet the effect never seems labored or contrived. Take for example his seemingly relaxed poem, "Government in Exile." Could one remove half a line without substantially changing the movement and meaning of the poem?

Silence, and on the wall the photographs—
Farms, mountains, faces; the sad specifics
Corrode the heart, sharpen the will. Despair
Is shrugged away and stares one in the face.

Loyalty is poured out—a libation
To childhood villages, to stones, to trees.

[4] SEEING THE WORLD, by *Dick Davis*. Anvil Press. $4.95.

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With this gift for brevity and grace under pressure it is not surprising that Davis has turned his attention to the epigram. What is surprising, however, is that he has turned away from the conventional image of the epigram as satiric form *à la* X. J. Kennedy or J. V. Cunningham (to name the two great American masters of the form) and has returned to the ancient notion of short, serious lyrics compressed into a few lines. He has abandoned the tradition of Martial for the example of the *Greek Anthology*. The results are often compelling short poems quite unlike anything else in contemporary English literature:

> See where the landscape glows and flares
> Lit by the beacons of desire—
>
> As faces grouped about a fire
> Give back the light that is not theirs.
>
> "False Light"

This obsession to condense experience and language into tight, controlled forms is matched by Davis' need to establish a moral dimension in his poetry. Morality for him seems to be an organizing principle as important as meter or diction. In some ways all three principles may even be different sides of the same vision of poetry. Implicitly or explicitly in almost every piece, poetry becomes a moral judgment of experience. Some readers will clearly resist a sensibility so certain of its mission, but a mind that can recreate and evaluate a scene in a few memorable lines deserves attention in this garrulous age.

Ever since I lived in Minneapolis, where local connoisseurs informed me in most matter-of-fact tones that the Walker Art Gallery was generally acknowledged to rival the Uffizi, that the Guthrie Theater summer stock outclassed the Salzburg Festival, that the IDS building downtown ranked with Chartres, and that Mary Tyler Moore was the new Garbo, I have been suspicious of Mid-Western cultural boosterism. Therefore over the past few years when three Nebraskans I met independently recommended the work of Ted Kooser, a poet who works as an insurance underwriter in Lincoln, I smugly made the resolution to remain in blissful ignorance. Now confronted with a review copy of *Sure Signs*,[5] a first-rate collection of Kooser's new and selected poems, I abhor my snobbism and repent in dust and ashes. As penance I promise to skip the cartoons in the next five issues of *The New Yorker* and talk for five minutes to the next insurance man who calls up during dinner.

Kooser is a master of the short poem. Only two of the eighty-nine poems in *Sure Signs* run longer than one page, and their average length is only about a dozen lines. Within these narrow bounds Kooser seems ready to try anything. His poems are most often bizarre, surrealistic anecdotes, little stories where details and metaphors acquire an unruly life of their own. Kooser obsessively sees things as people (ladders as men, mice as refugees, a furnace as an old man), and it is not unusual for one of these things to get up and walk away with the poem. So many of the

[5] SURE SIGNS, by *Ted Kooser*. University of Pittsburgh Press. $9.95; $4.50.

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poems have surprising twists that one never settles into that sort of drowsy half-attention that too much dinner or too much poetry can bring on. I found it impossible to put *Sure Signs* down until I had finished the entire book. It was like sitting next to a box of chocolates before dinner. I kept intending to put the book down to finish later, but kept sneaking one more poem until there were none left. I suspect that praising a book of poems for being so readable will cause much suspicion in certain parties. I can only direct the skeptical to the book itself and ask if they can find fault with a collection alternately so delightful and mysterious and always so unassuming.

What is especially refreshing about Kooser's work is the originality of its imagery. Nowadays when most poets plug in "striking, original" images as mechanically and predictably as their grandparents plugged in standard rhymes, it is a pleasure to read a poet like Kooser whose imagination is naturally metaphorical. When this gift for metaphor combines with Kooser's eerie sense of humor, the results are usually memorable, as in "Spring Plowing":

> West of Omaha the freshly plowed fields
> steam in the night like lakes.
> The smell of the earth floods over the roads.
> The field mice are moving their nests
> to the higher ground of fence rows,
> the old among them crying out to the owls
> to take them all. The paths in the grass
> are loud with the squeak of their carts.
> They keep their lanterns covered.

Notice how conventionally this surprising poem begins. The first five lines, which could have been written by any competent poet, scarcely prepare us for what follows. Kooser compresses several implicit metaphors into the next four lines before ending with a sinister, enigmatic image. Yet the poem never becomes clumsy or crowded. This macabre smoothness is Kooser's distinctive touch. On the very next page in "Sitting All Evening Alone in the Kitchen" one finds the same smooth, simple surface covering a complex organization of symbols:

> The cat has fallen asleep,
> the dull book of a dead moth
> loose in his paws.
>
> The moon in the window, the tide
> gurgling out through the broken shells
> in the old refrigerator.
>
> Late, I turn out the lights.
> The little towns on top of the stove
> glow faintly neon
> sad women alone at the bar.

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My only complaint is that the book gives no clue to how the poems are organized. Are they arranged chronologically, randomly or under some organic principle I have not discerned? Still this small confusion cannot hamper the enjoyment of such a unique and unassuming talent. Learn from my mistakes. Pull down thy vanity and read Ted Kooser.

Ronald Perry's *Denizens*[6] is an extremely mysterious volume of poetry, but anything less curious would probably have been uncharacteristic for a man who (the author's note informs me) has worked successively as a cryptographer in the Army, a creative writing fellow in Iowa, an airlines reservation agent in Miami, a secretary to an engineering firm in Laos, and currently as an advertising and public relations man in the Bahamas. From 1956 to 1962 Perry published four books of poems (some of which apparently are included in this volume although it is hard to tell which they are), then dropped out of sight until the publication of this extraordinary volume which Donald Justice has selected for the newly-inaugurated National Poetry series.

The poems in *Denizens* show an exceptional degree of technical assurance and finish. The book contains poems written both in free and formal verse. The formal poems alone make up an extremely diverse group ranging from unrhymed poems in simple metres to elaborately rhymed pieces in fixed stanzas including an interesting and uncharacteristically personal villanelle. The poems in free verse are also varied, written both in brilliant, lapidary lines reminiscent of early Stevens and flat, understated, conversational lines not unlike those of William Stafford. The subject matter is no less wide-ranging—with poems on the Hungarian Revolution, New York City, scrollpainting, Isak Dinesen and a small Bestiary.

There are also several groups of poems whose aim seems purely musical. These pieces are as close to "pure poetry" as anything I know of in contemporary American literature. Of course they contain ideas, for words necessarily convey ideas, but Perry handles his ideas as deftly and elusively as he does his rhymes. One must reach back to the twenties to find work similar to Perry's evanescent *ars poetica* in "Aria & Variations":

> But inside, always, the gold
> Ground, and the foursquare, air-
> Shaped house
> Of illusion. A window on the world
> Or the world's own window?
> Opens in or opens out? As long
> As there is open
> Sky at the ends of the fingers
> It does not matter. As long
> As there is the briefest, northern
> Touch of light, there will be
> The blue potential . . .

But ultimately Perry's diversity and surface brilliance work against

[6] DENIZENS, by *Ronald Perry*. Random House. $8.95; $5.95.

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him. The poems never come together as a book but remain moments of isolated inspiration. Rereading the book becomes a little like listening to a spectacular performance of Karl Czerny's *études*. One hears almost everything but a distinctly personal voice behind the music. And if tomorrow I were informed by Random House that each of the book's six sections had been written by a different poet each from a separate part of the English-speaking world, I would readily believe it, thinking perhaps the volume was a small but excellent anthology made up of poems submitted individually by a cryptographer, a writing fellow, an airlines reservation agent, an engineering firm secretary, an advertising executive, and the wily Donald Justice writing under a pseudonym. Still Perry's failures interest me more than most poets' successes, and I hope his next book either proves me wrong or presents six more voices as unpredictable as those in *Denizens*.

The poems in John N. Morris' *The Glass Houses*[7] intrigued me so much that I searched out his first two volumes, *Green Business* (1970) and *The Life Besides this One* (1975). Reading all three books together confirmed my feeling that Morris is a serious poet with a genuine sense of his own direction. But for all its excellence this current volume marks for the most part no change from his earlier books. The notable development in Morris' work has been a narrowing of focus—technically and imaginatively—into a few, well-defined kinds of poems, and while he has lost some of his earlier variety in this process, he has gained in intensity.

The characteristic poem in *The Glass Houses* is written in quiet and controlled free verse with uncomplicated syntax and intelligent, conversational diction. Spoken usually in the first person singular or plural, the poems have a familiar, elegiac tone that I find immediately engaging. "Archeology," which opens the volume, demonstrates these characteristics. It begins:

> Almost nothing mysterious is
> To be found. This attracts us.
> Seldom will we break into
> Some Pompeiian perfect room
> Preserved to us by a catastrophe
> Or in the conservative bog unearth
> Fresh evidence of an ancient
> Accomplished intention, a ferocious
> Strangling or its punishment.

The opening poem in each of Morris' previous volumes carefully announces the themes of the book, and "Archeology" is no exception. The key phrase here is "almost nothing mysterious is to be found." The strength of Morris' imagination is that it is based on the images and situations of everyday life. While all of the poems in *The Glass Houses* are in some sense concerned with time, Morris' preoccupation with what he sees as a botched past and doomed future never becomes pretentious because

[7] THE GLASS HOUSES, by *John N. Morris*. Atheneum. $10.00; $5.95.

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each poem is grounded so believably in things everyone in contemporary America has experienced. The title of the opening poem also signals the pervasive attitude of the poet. Morris sees himself as a sort of archeologist digging into his own past or the lives of the people around him, trying to piece the fragments he uncovers into some meaningful pattern. In "The Common Life" Morris looks at an anonymous middle-aged, suburban couple and tries to understand what they are living for. This is the kind of question any intelligent person asks himself, but it is rare to see it dealt with so directly and humanely in poetry:

> We say, *What is the matter with them?*
> *They ought to be dying of boredom.*
> But they know they are not in
> All this simply for the fun of it.
> If they are the open book we say,
> It is a work of some distinction,
> A life. Though it seems to go on
> Forever, it will not really take long
> To finish it—and things
> Almost always liven up at the end.

There is really only one complaint to be lodged against this accomplished, unified volume. While there are no bad poems in *The Glass Houses*, neither are there any unforgettable, perfect poems. A few pieces like "Archeology," "The Way We Live Now," and "The Common Life," come close, but the reader always has the feeling that if Morris had tried just a little bit harder the results could have been breathtaking. But it is ungracious to complain about such an honest and careful poet, and a critic who has not written a book of poems as good as *The Glass Houses* shouldn't throw stones.

R. M. Ryan is a stockbroker in whom Louisiana University Press has certainly made a wise investment by publishing *Goldilocks in Later Life*,[8] his first book of poems. Ryan has the sort of imagination I would like to say belongs to the common man except that average people never speak in such a precise and interesting way. Ryan takes familiar things—fairy tales, program notes, board games like *Monopoly* or *Clue*— and turns them into portents bearing on our lives. The common theme underlying all of Ryan's poetry is that familiar things are never as simple or as harmless as they seem. His language is complex and allusive, his tone is often mysterious, but he never uses any element that an average reader would not immediately recognize. He has consciously developed a flexible, prosy style that is tightened into poetry by the force of his syntax:

> Enough of all our little lives. Enough
> of what we didn't mean to be but are.
> Enough. It's morning once again. The sun

[8] GOLDILOCKS IN LATER LIFE, by *R. M. Ryan.* Louisiana State University Press. $9.95; $4.95.

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while not as bright as the day we started off
when good wishes like confetti flew
manages to shine, and the winds are strong . . .
"Man Crying on the Deck"

The first section of *Goldilocks In Later Life* is quite appropriately a series of reinterpretations of fairy tales, myths, and fables. Some of these are quite good, especially the title poem, but Ryan's real strength comes out later in poems about everyday scenes and personalities. The best pieces in the book take place not in fairyland but the suburbs. And it is in poems like "The Man Who Wasn't There Arrives," "The Discovery of a Country Where Fiction Thrives," "Man Crying On the Deck," "Flowers On Our Wedding Anniversary" that I suspect Ryan will build his reputation. Most of his poems are in free verse, but occasionally he ventures into more regular forms. From a purely technical viewpoint, these metrical pieces are often awkward, but surprisingly most of them still work as poems. The strength of his ideas and the energy of his syntax keep his poems going despite slips in form. A typical Ryan poem is "The Disappearance of America," a quick, evocative piece based on a simple rhetorical trick superbly executed. Those who respond to this kind of imagination (as I do) will find much to their liking in Ryan's book:

Think of all the towns that died, of Brilliant,
gone; of Shakespeare, of Golden, even Bland,
where lives went on, like those of Madam Varnish
and her daughters or Hubert Love, who fought
a bear and won. Think about the coffin
M. C. Logan kept inside his store,
about the Ethyl Silver Trumpet Band.
Think of Turkey Creek Jack Johnson now
or the blurred girl who moved in the photograph
of the Chance City July the Fourth parade
as you go home, hardly noticing
the cars that pass and are not seen again.

As an admirer of Mary Baron's chapbook, *Letters for the New England Dead* (Godine, 1974), I am slightly disappointed by her first full-length book, *Wheat Among Bones*.[9] Somehow this unusual, gifted poet has turned out a very conventional first book, and unfortunately most of the best poems are ones from the earlier collection. By no means is *Wheat Among Bones* an undistinguished collection of poems. Its problem rather is that it is so predictable. A list of subjects for her poems reads like a ready-order catalogue of feminist poetics—pregnancy, childbirth, failed love affairs, the difficult relationship with one's mother, the difficult relationship with one's daughter, *etcetera*. Certainly these are important subjects, but an im-

[9] WHEAT AMONG BONES, by *Mary Baron*. Sheep Meadow Press. $4.95.

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portant subject does not necessarily make a poem work, and lately these topics have been so exhaustively treated that one expects a good poet to say something meaningfully new or keep silent, and Baron is content to pass over them mostly in familiar ways. Her weakness as a writer is to be satisfied with an adequate performance instead of a superb one. Much to her credit, she does not publish incompetent poems, but, much to our disappointment, she rarely labors towards spectacular ones. To choose one poem which illustrates Baron's many strengths—her intelligence, her unpretentious honesty, her ability to draw on her Irish Catholic upbringing to illuminate general questions—here is "*Ite, Missa est*," which draws its title from the last words of the Latin Mass ("Go, you are sent forth") to make an ironic point about her feelings toward the Church:

> He would not take me back. He'd know I came
> home only as a tired child, to rest.
> *Introibo ad altare Dei*—I'd come
> but only go again, and in between
> I'd hide myself in his oblivion,
> hoarding all my strengths for human tasks.
> No, I cannot go home there, anymore.
> But still, within this plainsong's Latin peace,
> I say, "my Jesus, mercy" to the dark.

Wheat Among Bones shows a poet still in transition. Baron has left the polished but vernacular formalism of her early work and is moving into open forms. So far her later work does not always demonstrate the command of language she had in her early poems, but some of the new poems do show a new intensity and flexibility. Preeminent among her new poems is "Brood Bitch," a sequence which radically revises the story of Penelope. In Baron's version, Penelope, whose voice often merges with the poet's, is unfaithful to Odysseus. Occasionally the writing falls flat in the sequence ("Penelope is maybe pregnant. / She wants it out of her, / quick"), but the fifteen poems which make up the sequence make compelling reading. "Brood Bitch" promises that Baron is entering an exciting new phase in her writing.

No one will accuse Vicki Hearne of publishing a conventional book of poems. The dustjacket informs one that she is "a professional horse and dog trainer in Riverside, California," and the title of her first book, *Nervous Horses*,[10] proves absolutely literal. Of the forty-eight poems contained in the volume, twenty-eight of them are about horses. Not symbolic horses, real ones. Many of the remaining poems are about animals. And ironically the book has been published by the University of Texas Press. Such hippomania will certainly frighten away most readers, but *Nervous Horses* deserves a close look. There is a sense of real excitement in reading Hearne's best poems—the excitement of seeing the familiar world from

[10] NERVOUS HORSES, by Vickie Hearne. University of Texas Press. $9.95; $4.95.

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an entirely fresh perspective. Like Ted Hughes's best poems in *Moortown*, Hearne's work stands in sharp contrast to "poetic" descriptions of the rural landscape. They are country poems by someone who really lives off the land.

In "Riding a Jumper," which for me is the best poem in the book, Hearne manages to write a tough, unsentimental description of a landscape. Early one cold morning at the end of summer she rides along the fence bordering a familiar field keeping her eye on a herd of pastured mares. But she is more interested in the fence than the mares:

> Was this a place
> To reach after awkward travels? For us
> A fence shouldn't mark so fine a line
> Along the legal ground, one recorded length
> Of someone else's orchard. The fence should mark
> A fast hard leap that we could choose to make
> Or not, onto the brittle drought-dry ground.

Now no one, not even a woman on horseback, can go through the country talking about fences without bringing Robert Frost to mind. But here I think Hearne survives the comparison. She convinces the reader she is talking about a real fence, not a moral one, and even if she starts to philosophize, she ends up dismissing her fantasies for reality:

> Almost any line enclosing one
> Universe or separating two
> Or more will do for visions. This one serves
> To bring the horse and me limping back
> To measure it again, to judge a leap,
> To leap, or wait, or turn to find the mares
> Knee-deep in grass, irrevocably calm.

This is honest, admirable poetry. Anthologists of women's poetry should take special note. Here is an independent-minded woman who writes unpredictable, personal poems. Whatever the limits of Hearne's talent, it is honest and original. Curiously, the elegiac tone, which dominates so many first books of contemporary poetry, is entirely absent in Hearne's work. Even the poems about death are hard and unsentimental. Hearne is introspective without being sad, and it is refreshing to know that there is at least one cowgirl out there who doesn't get the blues.

The Various Light[11] is Alfred Corn's third and finest book of poetry. Each of his earlier volumes contained much interesting work—especially the long, ambitious title poem of *A Call in the Midst of the Crowd* (1976) which counterpointed a decisive year in the poet's life against the changing seasonal background of New York—but this new collection shows a consistency of concentration and inspiration unmatched in the earlier books.

[11] THE VARIOUS LIGHT, by *Alfred Corn*. Viking. $12.95; $6.95.

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Corn has always cultivated a relaxed, informal voice. "Prosiness feels right," he once commented in a poem, and while this informality has made his work engaging and witty, it sometimes allowed his verse to become too diffuse. In *The Various Light* Corn has overcome this one weakness without losing any of his many strengths. The result is a fully realized volume by an important new poet.

Corn's poems are moments of intense attention. When this attention is turned to the outer world, his visual sense dominates, and the reader often has the excitement of seeing something familiar as if for the first time, as in "Grass":

> There's always more going on
> Than anyone has the wit to notice:
> Look at those black ants, huge,
> In their glistening exoskeletons.
> Algebraically efficient,
> They're dismembering a dragonfly—
> Goggle-eyed at being dead
> And having its blue-plated chassis,
> Its isinglass delicately
> Leaded wings put in pieces.
> When you get right down to it,
> The earth's a jungle. . . .

When this attention is turned inward, Corn's auditory sense predominates. Here the poems move forward obliquely through association, wordplay, and allusion. It is no surprise then that the sequence, "Songs for Five Companionable Singers," which is one of the most private poems in the volume, is an auditory *tour de force* composed of three villanelles, a sestina, and a pantoum. Corn's imagination tends to be quiet and reflective, and occasionally these meditative poems become almost inaccessible, like brilliant but private messages read out of context—as in "One to One," which begins:

> Unwrap the message hidden in a wound
> Or a word: a branching spray of avowals, cut,
> Massed, left to glide deathward in a vase. . . .
> Face to face, a match, together until we choose;
> And afterwards as well, isn't too much to hope for.

There is much to praise in Corn's work—its scope, its verbal inventiveness, its rare balance of sophistication and honesty—but what I most admire is its intelligence. One does not often praise an American poet for intelligence. Quite the opposite. Listening to most critics applaud strength, speed, passion, and intensity, one might easily conclude that a poet was good only insofar as he resembled a prizefighter. But Corn's work packs an intellectual punch as much as a visceral one. One cannot read poems

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like "Town Center in December" or "Reading *Pericles* in New London" without learning something about contemporary life. In this way Corn's work recalls Auden's underrated and often misunderstood later poetry. The comparison with Auden is not gratuitous. Corn obviously sees himself as a successor in the tradition Auden created in American poetry. Maybe Corn and Sugar Ray Leonard do have something in common after all—they both are serious contenders for a heavy-weight title.

During the past two months as I read and reread through the piles of new books on my desk in preparation for this chronicle, I found myself repeatedly going back for refreshment to two new books of Chinese translations. Appropriately or not, classical Chinese poetry represents a sort of dream world into which a modern reader can escape. The simple tone, the frank pictorialism, and the warm human values of most Chinese poetry make it impossible to resist. For readers like myself who will never know a single Chinese ideogram, the particular qualities which make any Chinese poet or poem great will probably always remain as inscrutable as the language. Yet so much of value comes across in translations as good as those by Kenneth Rexroth or Jonathan Chaves that it seems paranoid to worry about what may be lost. Rexroth's newest collection[12] translates all of the surviving poems of Li Ch'ing Chao, China's greatest woman poet, who lived from 1084–c.1151. As always, Rexroth's versions from the Chinese (done in collaboration with Ling Chung) are graceful and moving. Occasionally one hears his own voice overlap with the poet's and produce lines which seem exceptionally personal, as at the end of this book when Ch'ing-chao talks about old age in a poem set "To the Tune 'Immortals on the River Bank' ":

> I grow old in this old city.
> Songs of love, moon, and wind are gone
> With the past.
> I am old and have accomplished little.
> No one cares for me now.
> I wither away like last year's
> Scattered leaves.
> I have no desire to light the lantern,
> No desire to walk in the last snow.

Jonathan Chaves' translations from the Ming poet, Yüan Hung-tao, in *Pilgrim of the Clouds*[13] are also very fine, but what one remembers most distinctly from Yüan's poetry is not its striking imagery and sense of drama but its wisdom:

[12] COMPLETE POEMS, by *Li Ch'ing-chao,* translated and edited by *Kenneth Rexroth* and *Ling Chung.* New Directions. $9.95; $4.95.

[13] PILGRIM OF THE CLOUDS, by *Yüan Hung-tao,* translated by *Jonathan Chaves.* Weatherhill. $6.95.

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ON RECEIVING MY LETTER OF TERMINATION

The time has come to devote myself to my hiker's stick;
I must have been a Buddhist monk in a former life!
Sick, I see returning home as a kind of pardon.
A stranger here—being fired is like being promoted.
In my cup, thick wine; I get crazy-drunk,
eat my fill, then stagger up the green mountain.
The southern sect, the northern sect, I've tried them all:
this hermit has his own school of Zen philosophy.

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JAMES FINN COTTER

For Better or Worse: The Year's Verse

WAS 1979 A VINTAGE YEAR FOR POETRY? From Katharyn Machan Aal to Frederick Zydek, Alan F. Pater has compiled his stock for an anthology[1] chosen from monthlies and quarterlies, magazines, journals and periodicals that printed poems from October 31, 1978, to October 31, 1979. Pater edited this annual collection from 1935 through 1942, succeeding William Stanley Braithwaite who was editor from 1913 to 1929. Despite the long time gaps, these two men have almost spanned a century with their commendable effort to give the fragile life of magazine poetry a living record of its memory. This edition, published by the Monitor Book Company, is handsomely produced and generous in its oversized format and nearly 600 pages. May it continue to appear each year to the eyes of all posterity. And may it continue to improve.

"An effort has been made," Pater tells us in his preface, "to include poems of various lengths, forms and styles, as well as a multiplicity of subjects and geographical originations." Poems are selected from publications in the United States and Canada; some translations are also included. Pater goes on to explain that "the quality of the individual poem is the main criterion for acceptance." True: The worth of that is that which it contains.

But I sense a possible conflict here. What if several dozen sonnets, for example, are presented as representative of the year's effort in that genre and none, or few, are any good? Take the opening quatrains of this random selection:

> To celebrate this season I must find
> Some ancient poem written in my youth
> When April was a constant season, blind
> To such realities as winter truth.
>
> "Forsythia Is the Color I Remember" by Joseph Cherwinski (*The Lyric*)

> I sense that I may someday be assailed
> As one who was not master of his craft,
> And sailed anachronistic ships that quaffed
> The waters of a long dead art, impaled
> Upon the ragged rocks . . .
>
> "Arcady Revisited" by Robert Funge (*Western Poetry Quarterly*)

[1] ANTHOLOGY OF MAGAZINE VERSE & YEARBOOK OF AMERICAN POETRY: 1980 EDITION, edited by *Alan F. Pater,* Introduction by *William H. Pritchard.* Monitor Book Company. $25.00.

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We walk together, breathing different air,
Heart-chilled by different winds, consumed by fires,
Unruly flames that soar or veer or glare,
Igniting embers of unvoiced desires.
"Chilled by Different Winds" by Alice Mackenzie Swaim (*Voices International*)

This is my country, all this golden plain:
These mountains rising high and purple-blue,
These forests cool and fragrant in the rain,
These meadows silver with the morning dew.
"The Greater Country" by Grace V. Watkins (*Pentecostal Evangel*)

As every freshman who has completed the Introductory Course in Literature should know, these poems belong in the chapter describing Bad and Mediocre Verse. To the reader's delight, there is even a bad sonnet entitled "What Is a Sonnet?" which begins, predictably, by asking "What is a sonnet? It is not heart's blood, / Mind's sanity nor index of the soul." What is it? one anxiously inquires. In his sestet, Edward Watkins (from *Song*) informs us as to what it is *not* and then in the octave the *volta* declares: "No, it is meter, rhythm, form, tone color, / Assonance, alliteration, rhyme." Of course, this poem may be deliberately bad; if so, it succeeds.

Except for Cedric Whitman's "Dissonance," from *Poetry*—and it owes its original inspiration to Robert Frost's "The Oven Bird"—and Willis Barnstone's tribute to Borges from *The American Scholar*, the collected sonnets lack the quality Pater claims as his criterion for selection. The same holds true for the literary ballad. We have heard it all before:

On Corwen Road
I met a maid
more fair than any known,
all zephyr soft and perfumed as
the sweetest briar blown.
"On Corwen Road" by Jay Ames (*Poet Lore*)

Kissed and beckoned, the hero follows "swift as man / might follow any maid" to the edge of a lake, concluding that she is "far too gossamer a thing / for such an oaf as I." Difficult as it is, one must refrain from comment.

On the subject of bad poetry, I wish that the majority of items from *The Lyric* had been omitted. Judge for yourself:

In a World of Change

Exit the fond, the familar. Enter the strange.
Time is defined
As the measure of change.

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Future shock explodes the status quo.
The faster things change
The older we grow.

I hold the secret of eternal youth.
I cling to You,
O unchanging Truth.

Joseph Awad

I will spare you "The Little Searcher" by Donna Bowen ("Day spread her lap and bade me choose—"), "Pygmalion" by Hans Brockerhoff ("Those eyes still shine which promised that behind . . . "), "Lost Companions" by Helen Bryant ("I cannot believe them old, nor believe them dead"), "Country Cemetery" by Freda Newton Bunner ("I wrote him out a check,"), nor will I quote the rest of the alphabet from *C* to *Z* of *Lyric* authors, many of whom, it goes without saying, show a weakness for sonneteering.

During 1979, to judge from this anthology, religious poetry continues to be badly written. Some poems from *Christianity Today* are simply embarrassing, like these lines from "Children's Lenten Wisdom" by James A. Houck:

Ashes, ashes, all fall down
Upon their knees before their God;
Ashes, ashes, all fall down
And bare their backs for chast'ning rod.

—or these from "Invocation From a Lawn Chair" by Mary Jean Irion:

In pink and ivory double row
along the concrete patio,
two dozen powdered roses grow.

The Pentecostal Evangel offers even worse fare, like the opening quatrain of Albert L. Hoy's sonnet, "The Hour of Prayer":

How glorious is the hour of secret prayer,
When one withdraws to some familiar place,
Perhaps a quiet room with desk and chair,
Where supplication meets refreshing grace!

One can hear Alceste in the background, advising Oronte not to show his poems to anybody: "Why you should wish to publish, heaven knows."

Enough of the worst poetry in the anthology; let us look at the better and best. By chance, the first and last poems provide excellent examples of opposing styles in contemporary verse. Katharyn Aal's "Ants," from *Poets On,* is written in the plain manner:

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I stood in my mother's kitchen
staring at dead ants. At least
fifty littered the orange countertop,
grotesque little bodies twisted from the poison
sprayed from a can last night.

As she watches, two live ants appear and the poet reflects on her mother's vain effort to push back the things that destroy, but that always return. No more than this. Like many other poets, Aal makes a statement through a moment's observation and leaves it at that stopped instant for the reader to observe in turn and reflect. Frederick Zydek, on the other hand, in "Dark Room," from *Southwest Review,* traces the stages of a woman's insanity in an ornate, even elegiac, style which counterpoints the horror of his subject:

It was the Autumn of her madness,
developing some residue from the savage within.
She knew the shapes of silence, seasons
of yeasty roots, the wine's thin secret.

He concludes: "And I saw her image move from darkness / into the loneliness she knew and favored." The poem's formal language and rhythm sustain its aloof seriousness and acceptance. We are as far away as *Z* is from *A* from the simplicity of the first poem; most of the poetry in this volume falls somewhere in between, closer to the colloquial Aal than to the eloquent Zydek. "Less Is More" (*Poetry*) is Vern Rutsala's wry summary of the taste of our time.

Many poets prefer the plain style in describing the remembered experiences. "My Father Dragged By Horses" (*Cedar Rock*) by T. Alan Broughton possesses clean narrative power, and "The Rattlesnake" (*The Chowder Review*) by Robert Wrigley weaves natural imagery into the actual event. In "Hunting With My Father" (*Ploughshares*), Tom Asher recalls the early morning ritual of preparing for the day of hunting and sees it as an initiation into "the greater world." Karen Swenson graphically describes the process of finding clothes for the laying-out ceremony while the corpse is "shut into public display." "Grave Clothes" (*Denver Quarterly*) is detached in its irony and yet personal in its love and anger. In one of the best poems collected here, "Daughter" (*The Atlantic Monthly*), Ellen Bryan Voight catches the frightening instant of a child's choking and a mother's violent effort to save her. In a more quiet example of plain writing, Wendell Berry's "The Way of Pain" (*New England Review*) develops the relationship between father and son with lyrical economy and grace.

A number of other poems deserve special mention. Dick Allen's "Green Pastures" (*Poetry*) combines nature (not often well treated in these pages) in a setting of barbed wire and radar with the philosophical question of life's meaning: "Surely it is time / to rest, to lie down in the green beneath the blue / and call it a day." While the moral seems too explicitly drawn, the religious theme, framed in the reference to the psalms, is left

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implied in the boy's visit to the unfamiliar field. "Jogging At Dusk" (*The American Scholar*) by Andrew Grossbart also re-creates a personal moment with the thoughts it gives rise to:

> The last minutes of light. My slow shadow
> moves distinct against the red dirt, muscles
> and tendons easing to their new routine.

As he runs, the poet feels "the whole Missouri landscape" move with him. In the distance, electric lights and the noise of trucks blend with the surge of his own breathing and footsteps until "the sad soft light of evening guides me in."

Philip Booth in "Old Man" (*The American Poetry Review*) contrasts a man's romantic dream of a young woman ("This is a sleep I am lucky to wake from") with the reality of their meeting:

> By the time I walk down over the hill
> for the *News,* she is opening her store.
> She turns in the doorway, her son in arms,
> and smiles. I nod and smile, trusting myself
> not to say I adore her, trusting her
> to dream what I have not said.

The real meeting, of course, is with the *anima* and the waking consciousness. Daniel Hoffman's "Himself" (*The Hudson Review*) provides a more introspective look into the Self that grows along with the ego and independent of it:

> In this very room there is
> A youth he has outgrown, whose ease
> With the world is greater than his own,
>
> Whose gifts are greater than his gifts,
> Whose joys are deeper joys
> Than any he has known.

Both these important poems should outlive the year 1979. They embody the strength of saying things in a straightforward way that remains at the same time deeply poetic.

Sister Maura writes a fine poem in *The Christian Century* (not all the news is bad) in the form of a tribute to a fifty-two-year career in the classroom; it is titled "A Short History of the Teaching Profession." In "The Library" (*Poetry*), John Logan offers a detailed picture of Dublin's National Library with its Celtic harp, rows of leather volumes, and the Book of Kells. In spite of its ornate subject matter and intricate detail, the poem is a model of the use of spatial order and exact description. David Wagoner remembers the poet Theodore Roethke as a gardener in his

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"Elegy While Pruning Roses" (*Poetry*). Every step of husbandry is dwelt on and related with equal artistic skill to the making of poetry. Roethke was not cut off in his prime but "near the end of a long good growing season" before the first frost: "You knew where roots belonged, what mysterious roses / Come from and were meant for. . . . " Wagoner presents an ironic view of a poet in "Ode to the Muse on Behalf of a Young Poet" (*The Atlantic Monthly*). He is one of the few authors lucky enough to have more than one poem in this anthology.

Some of the satiric verse presented here shows that wit, unlike piety, has not faded and died. "Women Called Bossy Cowboys" (*Canadian Forum*) by Beth Jankola parodies the chauvinistic Soviet attitude toward women ("their language makes even strong men blush"), while "The Educational Administration Professor's Prayer" (*Educational Studies*) by Gerald Bobango provides a witty parallel to the Prayer of Saint Francis in modern jargon: "Where there is order and stability, let me sow / specious seeds of semanticism; / Where there is memorization, let me be aghast." In "End of the Affair" (*Colorado Quarterly*), Curtis W. Casewit (!) bids a humorous farewell to his mistress, complaining that she chose her house rather than the motel ("one last time?") to break up with him. Lou Lipsitz in "The Radical in the Alligator Shirt" (*Carolina Quarterly*) draws and quarters the protesters of ten years ago ("I used to sit-in against the marines / but now I get lost on the beach"). The humor is facile but agreeable.

In his perceptive Introduction, William H. Pritchard comments on some of the better less-is-more poetry. He notes the theme of familial remembrances and its expression in rhythmically distinct tones that adhere to the "natural movements of a speaking voice." He rightly praises Marita Garin's "White Spider" (*National Forum*) as a "small model for much of the good work done in this anthology." The "stopped moment" is the chief concern of this poetry and Pritchard quotes Gary Gildner's "My Father After Work" (*New Letters*) and Sam Hamill's "The Wakening" (*Cutbank*) as two further examples of successful poems of this type. Pritchard, however, is critical enough to wonder if less is really more or does it simply remain less? When poems surrender traditional meter and rhyme, the question remains open. Pritchard does not mention the many poems Pater has included which do employ strict form and pattern with, as we have seen, mediocre results. He treats instead the poet's voice which can be impersonal, as in James Richardson's "Dividing the House" (*The Ohio Journal*), or personal, as is Frederick Morgan's in his moving elegy for his son, "February 11, 1977" (*The American Scholar*). Both voices in the best poems converge in the universal, mythic awareness of our common joys and griefs.

Pritchard selects for particular praise an astonishing poem by Linda Bierds, "Mid-Plains Tornado" (*The Seattle Review*); it begins:

> I've seen it drive straw straight through a fence post—
> sure as a needle in your arm—the straws all erect
> and rooted in the wood like quills.

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It continues to describe the storm's fury with forceful images and concludes with a nightmarish vision of nature's cruelty that is Homeric and superb. With discoveries of otherwise unknown work like this, Pritchard defends the existence and necessity of such an anthology: it is a great equalizer by making us look at the individual poem among its fellows. One cannot but agree, while wishing some of the company better qualified for inclusion. In attempting to make more of less we also lessen the more.

Over 800 poems by some 750 poets from a variety of magazines suggests the scope of Pater's undertaking, but I missed seeing poetry from such worthy sources as *America, Kayak, The Nation, The New Republic, The Sewanee Review,* and *Thought.* Since newspapers are excluded, the poetry of, say, *The Christian Science Monitor* does not appear here. But be contented: the worth of that is that which it contains. In addition to the anthology, this edition features a "Yearbook of American Poetry" which includes a helpful bibliography of books of and about poetry published in 1979, as well as a directory of poetry publishers (book and magazine), a list of poetry associations and of awards, with the 1979 winners (and what a lot of prizes there were!) all bottled, labeled, and stored for present and future reference:

> O, sure I am, the wits of former days
> To subjects worse have given admiring praise.

Not even Shakespeare always wrote sonnets as good as Shakespeare's best.

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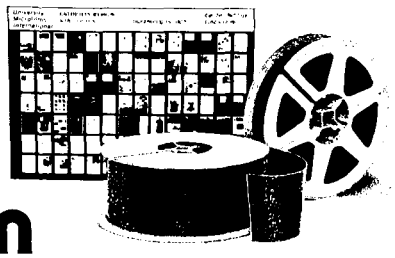

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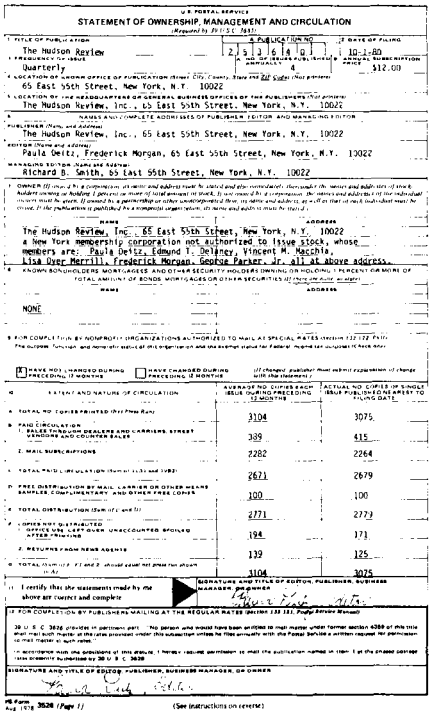

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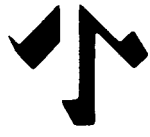

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